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ALL STORIES NEW AND COMPLETE!
MARCH, 1972 **VOL. 45, No. 6**

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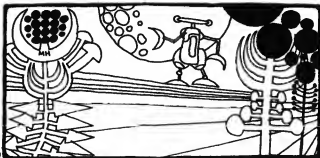
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**TED
WHITE**

EDITORIAL



SINCE THE FIRST issue of AMAZING STORIES carried an April cover date and, due to our present bimonthly schedule, we no longer publish an "April" issue, it's been a matter of minor concern to me whether we should celebrate our anniversary with the March or May issue. Last year we opted for the May issue. Since we were then terminating a contract with our old printer which required us to print this magazine simultaneously with its sister magazine, FANTASTIC (both issues printed in one unit and then, in the binding process, cut apart), we were too limited to do anything spectacular about our 45th anniversary anyway—no extra pages, for example.

A forty-sixth anniversary is somehow less exciting than a forty-fifth, but I think that under the circumstances we might be pardoned for celebrating it this issue. This issue, you see, we've turned the final corner in restoring AMAZING STORIES to the rank of first-class science fiction magazines. This issue we have dropped the reprints—permanently.

A few of you will groan at this and sit down to write me a letter about how much you miss the reprint. Most of you will join me in rejoicing that the reprint is no longer necessary.

The reprint policy actually dates back to the days of this magazine's former publisher, Ziff-Davis, when Sam Moskowitz helped choose and introduce long-forgotten stories which, in his judgment,

were worthy of resurrection. As such—one story per issue—they probably enhanced the magazine's image, since Sam ranged far and wide for the stories he picked, and they undoubtedly deserved being categorized as "classics." However, they were also an expediency, even then, and when Ziff-Davis made the decision to sell the two magazines to Ultimate it was because they had been operating at a financial loss for more than a year.

The recent history of this magazine (and FANTASTIC) is probably common knowledge to some of you, but I doubt if many of you were aware that the very survival of AMAZING STORIES depended upon Ultimate Publications' policy of devoting the bulk of the magazine's pages to reprints. Indeed, the original decision was not to publish *any* new stories after the meagre backlog of stories purchased from Ziff-Davis had been used up. AMAZING's first editor under Ultimate ownership, Joe Ross, worked long and hard, scouring the back files of the magazine for good and republishable stories, the reprint rights for which the company already owned. (Reprint rights were routinely purchased by the magazine's earlier publishers when they bought new stories; this practice has now been abolished.) It was only by slashing the editorial budget to the bone that the magazines were moved back into the black and their continued publication insured.

For the first year (1965) in which this

(Continued on page 126)

AMAZING STORIES



Past lives are "incredible" only to those who dare not confront them. In others, the fact of former existence can be quickly established subjectively.

There are many interesting cases of past lives in Scientology, applied religious philosophy:

One was a case of a young girl, about five, who hanging back at church, confided to her clergyman that she was worried about her "husband and children". It seems that she had forgotten them after "dying out of" another lifetime five years before.

The clergyman did not at once send for the chaps in white coats. Instead he questioned the truly worried child closely. She told him she had lived in a nearby village, and what her name had been. She said where her former body was buried, gave him the address of her husband and children and what all their names were, and asked him to drive over and find out if they were all right.

The clergyman made the trip. Much to his astonishment, he discovered the grave, the husband, the children, and all the current news.

The following Sunday he told the little five-year-old girl that the children were all well, that the husband had remarried pleasantly and that the grave was well kept.

She was satisfied and thanked the clergyman very much - and the following Sunday did not recall a thing about it.

Have you lived before this life ?

Past lives are not "reincarnation". That is a complex theory compared to simply living time after time, getting a new body, eventually losing it and getting a new one.

The facts of past lives, if you care to pursue them, are covered thoroughly in this book by L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology. The 43 complete and excitingly detailed true case histories in this book make even the sceptic ask...

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PROJECT XX

MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

Miriam Allen deFord is one of the grand old ladies of both mystery writing and science fiction, and her appearance here is the first in many years, as she describes a top-secret project and the moral dilemma it poses—in genetic research, who decides which are the successes and which the failures . . . ?

LUCAS HADN'T LOCKED the door—he seldom did, while he was still up and working. There was nobody to come in but one of his colleagues, and he had no objection to visits from any of them. So he wasn't surprised when the door opened softly and somebody slid silently into the room. Then he looked at his caller and was startled. It was the girl with the silver hair.

How had a Discard, still in her grey smock, managed to escape from the reservation, through the electrified wire and past armed sentries? And why, if she had escaped, had she come to him?

"What do you want?" he asked. His tone was harsh, because he still had Zimmerman's warning in his ears: "You've taken the oath now, and you're with us for five years. I don't expect you'll violate it—nobody has yet. But it is my duty to tell you that if you do, it will mean life imprisonment at the least, and probably—total elimination." And nothing could violate his oath more than being caught in private with a Discard. Automatically he set

the lock on his door so that no one else could enter, and adjusted the catch to turn off the double-sight plate.

The girl seemed hardly able to speak: and no wonder.

"Help me! Help me to get free!" she gasped.

"But that's utterly impossible," Lucas said sternly. "You must know that."

He had a sharp recollection of his first day at the Project, after the flight in a windowless jet and the blindfolded copter journey from the airfield. Zimmerman had recruited him and transported him; now he was orienting him. After the laboratories and the offices and the quarters for the staff, the liaison officer had remarked casually: "You understand, Broome, even after twenty-five years of experience, we haven't achieved 100% perfection—far from it. There are always by-products—failures, to put it frankly. We call them Discards. This is where they live."

He had conducted Lucas through the

wire fence into the immense reservation. If the whole Project covered an entire county, this was at least a village—a village with all the usual houses and shops and community buildings. But the inhabitants—

Still, six months later, sometimes when Lucas was just falling asleep he could see some of those creatures, though his work brought him into no contact with them and he had not been in the reservation since. The woman with the miniature twin growing from her shoulder—the three red-haired boys (brothers, would you call them?) with one pair of legs among the three of them—the young man whose single eye, above flat nostrils, took the place of a normal nose—the little girl, ten years old, Zimmerman told him, bent and wrinkled and grey like a woman of 80—so many others, each more horrible than the last.

And in the midst of them, emerging from what Zimmerman said was their library building, the perfectly normal-seeming, beautiful girl with the silver hair.

Lucas had pointed to her. "What's wrong with her?" he asked. "Surely just the color of her hair wouldn't condemn her to—this?"

Zimmerman had smiled.

"Every new staff member I take here asks me the same question. Of course not—she'd be a major success if her hair color were the only thing out of kilter. In fact, until she was fifteen she was in Class AA, one of the small group I showed you who will be our triumph if we find they breed true. Then we discovered she didn't belong there after all. You know, Broome, mind and body



are one—a psychological failure is as bad as a physiological one.”

He would say no more, just smiled his enigmatic smile.

And here she was, in his room, at night.

“I must take you back,” he said in a spate of panic. “Right now.”

“No you won’t,” she answered calmly. She had regained control of herself. “If you try, I’ll kill us both.”

Lucas Broome’s fascinated gaze dropped to the laser gun pointed at him.

“I took it from the sentry who tried to stop me,” she said gently. “I was too quick for him—I’ve been practicing with a dummy for months.

“Of course,” she added, “I had to shoot him, so he wouldn’t give the alarm. They’ll find him when the sentries change shifts at dawn. That’s why I must get away before then. You’ve got to take me out.”

“Be reasonable, won’t you?” His voice was hoarse. “This is a government project—you know that, don’t you? Even if I could get you away from here, where could you go? Have some sense, girl! There isn’t a place in the whole English Speaking Peoples’ Union where you wouldn’t be picked up at once.”

“I have a name—I’m not just ‘girl,’ ” she countered sulkily. “They call me Asta—we Discards have no last names, of course.” A note of bitterness crept into her voice. “Besides, I’m not going alone—you’re going with me. We’ll find a place together.”

“We will not!” Lucas cried. “Go ahead—shoot me. I’d be just as dead

when they got me, with a lot less trouble first.”

It hadn’t been a conscious bluff, but it worked. Her finger tightened on the trigger, but she didn’t squeeze it. Tears gathered in the big hazel eyes.

“That day,” she said in a low voice, “I saw you. You looked kind—not like those others, so cold and efficient and cruel. I thought you would want to help me. I didn’t think that in only six months they’d make you over into one of them.”

“I’m sorry—I can’t.”

He felt helpless, the more so for the pity welling up in him. He had a sudden horrifying picture of what life must be among the Discards for a normal—at least an outwardly normal—young girl.

“Why,” he had asked Zimmerman with a shudder that day, “do you let these—these things live? Why aren’t they killed as soon as you realized they’re failures? After all, they may have come from isolated sperm and ova, and have been gestated in a laboratory, but they’re human.”

“Yes, they’re human, and that’s why we can’t kill them. You remember what happened to the euthanasia bill last year, don’t you? They’ve been trying to put that over for fifty years now—ever since 1986. It’s still illegal in the ESPU to kill a human being.”

“So they have to live their miserable lives out in this prison?”

“It isn’t a prison, really, Dr. Broome. They have everything except the right to leave. They’re happy enough. Most of them die young, anyway. If the ones who grow up want to marry others of their kind, we let them. Of course we don’t allow them to reproduce—we

sterilize them as a wedding present."

Astra seemed to have been reading his mind. She was probably telepathic—most of the Discards were, a sort of sex-linked hereditary factor of their other discrepancies.

"What kind of life do you think I could have here?" she demanded. "They educated me—oh, yes, they educate all of us who are educable. I can read book-tapes and see the world through tridimens. I know what life is like in the free world. I can see other girls my age who are free to work, to travel, to visit the other Unions or go to the Moon or Mars. I can see them meeting normal men, falling in love, getting married, having children.

"Sure!" She laughed roughly. "I can meet men too, I can marry. I have a wonderful choice. I can fall in love with a man without arms and legs, or one with two heads, or one who wears his vital organs on the outside and has to live in a warm amniotic tank—"

"Stop!"

She laughed again.

"Did they tell you what was wrong with me?" she asked. "Because I'd like to know. They've never told *me*. I look just like most women—on the outside, don't I? Except that I'm prettier than most, and I know I'm smarter too. So why am I condemned for life to be one of a stable of freaks? Do you know, Dr. Lucas Broome? You see I know *your* name—I asked."

The gun wasn't pointing at him any more, but he knew it was ready to be raised in an instant. It didn't matter; his whole viewpoint was changing.

"Zimmerman didn't tell me," he

mumbled. "Except that he implied it was psychological."

"Oh, I see!" The hazel eyes glittered. "I don't *think* right, eh? I don't feel contented and acquiescent, the way their precious superhumans ought to do. Oh, I've figured it out, all right. There must be an outfit like this in every one of the Unions, every one of them hell-bent to produce the super-race that will breed true, before the others do, so as to become the dominant Union in the Federation, and control Earth and Mars, and the Venus Colony too, when that gets going. Fine—who cares about the inevitable errors, the by-products, the Discards? Most of them are too aberrant to matter—they couldn't get along in freedom anyway, and they're grateful to their keepers.

"Well, this time they've got a freak on their hands who *could* lead a decent life outside—yes, just like the true humans who had fathers and mothers and were really born. Just a little psychological quirk, and they didn't know what else to do with me, so the safest thing, when they found it out, was to throw me into the Discard heap. But I'm not taking it; I've been seven years now planning to escape. And you're the instrument I've chosen."

"But I've taken an oath of loyalty."

"You have a superior mind," the girl sneered, "or they'd never have recruited you for the staff. Oh, I know how they do it—how every time they have a vacancy they send Zimmerman around to the high-class graduate schools, with their lure of big salaries and comfortable living and super-hyper-important work for the Un-

ion—all in exchange for a loyalty oath—and five years as a hermit, out of communication with the outside.

"Have you ever wondered what happens at the end of those five years, if you don't want to renew the contract? I notice that everybody does renew—after they've realized what will probably happen if they don't."

Lucas looked at her, while a cold shiver ran down his spine. He could see Zimmerman, the tall, bald man with the incongruous out-of-fashion heavy mustache; he could hear him, that day in Dean Schofield's office. "You aren't thinking of marrying, Dr. Broome? Good. And you're an orphan—your parents were killed in the space-crash of the *Olaf Stapledon*, I understand—with no close relatives. Fine. Because if you accept our offer you will have no connection with the outside world while your contract is in force. Project XX is a top-secret government department. It has no mail service, not even a visiphone; I am its only link with outside.

"We're not asking you to give up all social life, of course—we have a big staff, delightful people all of them, many of them—hm—attractive young ladies. We've had more than one romantic match among our staff members—yes indeed."

"I'm not interested in that aspect," Lucas had said rudely. And he wasn't; it wasn't even the money, the nest-egg he could accumulate, the prestige he would gain, the opportunities that would be open to him afterwards—it was the service to his native ESPU; above all it was the work itself—the chance to be one of the pioneers, to

be associated with other geneticists in research of vital importance. So he had hardly hesitated. He did ask about his future prospects at the end of the contract, and Zimmerman had murmured suavely something about recommendations and appointments, in case he didn't want to renew every five years and stay with them indefinitely, as nearly all their staff did. "We seldom have a vacancy, Dr. Broome, except through the misfortune of death."

What a fool he had been! Of course he should have guessed that the most stringent oath of secrecy taken by anyone leaving the Project would never be enough; they would never feel safe.

So now, combined with this sudden surge of sympathy for the girl Asta, there was the realization that he too was a prisoner—a prisoner with a life sentence.

"I must think," he muttered in confusion.

There was a rattling at the door. Somebody had turned the knob and found the door locked, somebody who was trying vainly to see through the two-way plate.

"Are you there, Broome?" a voice called. "You said you'd show me those reaction-tests you made."

He recognized the voice—Hubbard, his immediate superior.

"Just a minute, Dr. Hubbard," he croaked.

"Who is it?" Asta whispered. He told her in another whisper.

"Open the door," she murmured in his ear. "I'll stand behind it and shoot him as he comes in."

He stared at her, appalled. She had already committed one murder, and

was quite prepared to commit another.

He shook his head violently. He looked around him wildly, then, his finger on her lips, shoved her into the bathroom. Thank heaven for the old-fashioned wet shower he'd preferred, instead of the usual ray-dusting one; there was a curtain that could be pulled around her. He pointed to it. She shrugged, but climbed in. He closed the bathroom door behind him and ran to let Dr. Hubbard in.

His panic had left him; he felt light-headed but in full command of his wits.

"I'm sorry," he apologized. "I forgot I'd locked the door. I thought you wouldn't be coming, when it got so late, and I was undressing to go to bed."

"My fault—I got tied up in the office," Hubbard smiled quizzically. "Sure you haven't got a female friend in here you're hiding from the old man?" He laughed at his own ponderous humor. "Maybe I'd better search the place. I know you young people!" He moved with heavy facetiousness toward the bathroom.

"Dr. Hubbard!" Lucas put all the outrage possible into his tone. "I think you should apologize," he said coldly. Hubbard, his banter misfiring, looked taken aback.

"I was only joking, my boy—no offense meant. Have you the test-reactions here—47-54-2, wasn't it? I wouldn't bother you, but I want to do a bit of work on them tonight. Just give me the rundown, and then I'll go and let you get your sleep."

Cursing himself silently—he had forgotten all about Hubbard, in the agitation of Asta's appearance—Lucas

went to the desk and fished out the data. Hubbard bent over them, making an occasional note on his own list.

"Good," he said at last. "Now I can have some new instructions for you when you come to the lab in the morning. Well, I'll be saying good-night and—"

He stopped short. They had both heard the shower being turned on.

Lucas should have turned pale from the shock, but he felt his face reddening instead. Dr. Hubbard's eyes widened behind his contact lenses.

"Aha!" he said waggishly. "So I was right, eh?" He chuckled. "Come, come, my boy, don't look so flabbergasted. We don't expect our people to be monks. I was young once, myself." He turned to leave. "Pleasant dreams! Just don't be late on the job tomorrow; I shan't even investigate to see which of our young lady staff members is missing tonight!"

Still chuckling, he let himself out. Lucas waited till Hubbard's steps died away, then hastily locked the door again. Shaking, he dashed to the bathroom.

Behind the opaque aerolon curtain, the splashing was still going on.

"You incredible idiot!" he shouted. "Were you trying to get us both killed?"

"You couldn't have had a better excuse," Asta replied calmly. "I did it deliberately, after I heard the old man teasing you. I knew he'd never come in here to look.

"Anyway, I had to wash and change, didn't I? You don't think we could get away with me in my regular clothing, do you? My smock and things are there

on the floor—take them and put them in your disposer unit to be incinerated, and then find me a tunic and trousers of yours to wear. And a cloak—it's cool enough to wear one, and with a loose cloak around me I can pass better for a man. I'm almost as tall as you are."

"But I have absolutely no plan—"

"I have. Get the things and put them in here, and then shut the door while I dress."

"Your hair—you can't hide that hair."

"I'll be an elderly man, with silver-grey hair. It's lucky my hair's no longer than most of you men wear yours around here. I'll wear my own sandals—there's nothing distinctive about them."

Like an automaton, Lucas followed her directions. She was taking it for granted that he would help her escape, and he was letting her. He sat down, his mind a blank. Weapons? He had no weapon. Where had she learned how to fire a laser? Nobody but Union police or the Federation supercorps was ever trained in handling weapons. Money? They'd have to have money if by some remote chance they got out of here. But nobody had need of money on the Project, and all his accrued salary was merely credited to him. Irrelevantly, he wondered if the enormous salary he was supposed to be earning was really allocated to him, or to any of them. If no one ever was permitted to leave, what need was there of building any actual fund?

In five minutes Asta emerged. Under the ceiling light-plates, no one in his senses would have mistaken her for a man, but perhaps in the darkness—

"Wait," he said. "We wouldn't get one step out of this building except as staff members. It was a miracle you got here unnoticed. I have an extra laboratory mask here; put it on. If we're unlucky enough to meet anybody, let me do the talking."

"Fine," she agreed promptly. "My own idea was to go to your laboratory first. Will there be anybody there?"

"Not at this hour. Hubbard's the only one who works late, but if he's around he'll be in his own office."

"Good. There are some things I hope we can pick up there. Then—"

"No, on second thought, I'd better not tell you more than one stage ahead. Then you can't be held responsible for what you don't know, and if we're caught we can say I held you captive with the laser gun, and I'll be the only one to be punished."

Suddenly Lucas was very angry.

"If I'm not mistaken," he said, his voice trembling with fury, "you came here this evening and begged me desperately to help you get free. I've agreed, against my better judgment. Now, it appears, you've got everything in hand; apparently for some reason you need my assistance, but all I have to do is obey your orders."

"This isn't a game, you know; it's a matter of life and death for both of us. You're quite out of line if you imagine I'm going to hide behind your skirts."

"Behind your own trousers, you mean," she retorted coolly. Then she lost her own temper. "You're a fool!" she cried. "Haven't you sense enough to see that it's just because I was desperate that I made my way to you, my

last hope? How do you think I felt when I had to shoot that sentry? When I had to nerve myself to kill another man if it became necessary?"

In the midst of Lucas's agitation, his heart leapt suddenly. So she wasn't a cold-blooded killer, after all.

"Desperate?" she went on. "It was only desperation that suggested a possible—not even a probable—way out! Yes, when I came here tonight, you were just somebody I hoped I could use—somebody I picked because he wasn't hardened yet and looked kind.

"But I can't, now—I can't any more. You could have turned me in when that man was here—you could have saved yourself. I *have* to think of the risk for you—I've—you're—"

She burst into tears. Lucas's uncontrollable heart turned over again. Before either of them willed it, she was in his arms, the soft silver hair against his eyes, their mouths meeting in a kiss that shook them both.

She was the first to pull away. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and essayed a wavering laugh.

"Well, that's done it!" she said shakily. "I might have known why, the first minute I saw you, my mind made itself up—that now at last I could try to escape—that you were the one who would make it possible. But I never meant to involve you like this—"

"Shut up!" he murmured against her cheek, his arms reaching out for her again. "Conceited little idiot! Do you fancy you're the only one to be struck by a lightning bolt? Come here to me!"

"... Oh, Lord, no, we mustn't—you'll be caught. We have to come to our senses."

He let her go, struggling with himself. Standing turned away from him, she too willed visibly for calm.

"My darling!" she whispered. She glanced at the ceiling clock. "Yes, we must hurry. We have five hours till dawn—they'll find that sentry then. We've got to be out of here altogether by that time—or I'll be dead."

"Or we'll both be dead. We're in this together, Asta—for keeps."

"For keeps." They dared not touch each other; their eyes spoke for them. "Let's go. Is there anything you want to take? I know you people have personal belongings—we don't."

"A few things." He bundled into his brief-case some photographs, a few letters, a ruby-set locket that had belonged to his mother, his father's heirloom watch that had come from some dead Broome of the days when there had been no clock on every ceiling and people had carried time around with them. His heart ached at the utter barrenness of Asta's past.

"Open the door a crack and see if the corridor is clear. I'll stand out of sight."

"All clear," he reported. "Come on."

They reached the laboratory without meeting anyone at all.

There, with the lights off in the entire building—even Dr. Hubbard, fortunately, seemed to have finished and gone to his private rooms—they tried to plan their strategy.

"I could take some of the crucial records, things they couldn't repeat, and use them as protection," Lucas began tentatively, and stopped dead. "No, I couldn't—not even for you. I was conditioned too early—I couldn't

become a traitor, under any provocation."

"I have nothing to be loyal to," said Asta wryly. "But I can understand, and I wouldn't let you even if you could. No, we have nothing to protect ourselves with—only one little laser gun, and that will soon need recharging. I'd give it to you, only I know how to use it—I learned from watching the sentries all these years—and I don't suppose you do."

"No, I don't. It wouldn't be of any use, anyhow—it could only postpone things for us."

"It's killed one man already," said Asta somberly.

"I know—that's why we must get out. Leave the gun here—wipe your fingerprints off it. You do have—"

"Yes, I have fingerprints, just like you. I'm practically human. . . . No, forgive me—I know you didn't mean it that way."

"We mustn't quarrel. We're both too wrought up; we're going to need all the coolness we can muster. Now what is your plan? Tell me quickly; we have no time to waste."

"Do you know just where we are?" she asked abruptly.

"Geographically? No, I don't. I know, from the distance I traveled, we must be somewhere in what used to be called the United States—somewhere in the west, I think. It was in Harvard that I met Zimmerman, and I'm sure we flew west and didn't cross any ocean."

"Is the laboratory building near the outer wall? Or aren't you fenced in, the way we are?"

"Come to think of it, we are—I'd

never given it a thought before. I guess they don't trust us lower echelon staff members as much as they say they do! I was flown in blindfolded, but from the windows here I've seen the sun glinting on metal; it must be half a mile or so away. I doubt it they keep sentries there, but probably it's electrified."

"I imagined there must be something like that. That's why I thought we'd better come here first. I don't know much about tools or machines, of course; but don't you have something here that would help us get through?"

"Wire-cutters, you mean, something like that? Plenty of them in the machine shop, and we could reach that without leaving this building. But we'd only get a fatal shock if we touched them to an electrified fence."

"But we *must* get through, and soon. I was sure you'd have something we could use."

"Not a thing. If you'd told me why you wanted us to come here—"

"Then we're sunk," she said gloomily. She straightened her shoulders.

"Lucas," she asked, "could we get to the copter lot, if we got through the fence?"

"Perhaps, but it wouldn't do us any good. I've never flown one of the things in my life, and of course you haven't."

"No. All right. I'd supposed all you free people could— My idea was to cut through the fence if there was one, and then steal a copter. I've read about the Union Parks—what they used to call National Parks, I think—and seen them on the tridimens. I thought we could head for the nearest one, and hide so they couldn't find us. They're wild country, you know, just the way it used

to be, with forests, and mountains with caves in them."

"And then what? Would we hide there forever? And what would we live on?"

"I don't know," she said sulkily. "What did people live on before all the food was synthetic? Wouldn't there be berries, and roots, and things? I know there are animals—I thought we could hunt them and cook them and—"

"My poor dear, with what? We can't suddenly go back seven or eight generations."

She glanced upward at the luminous clock. They had wasted nearly an hour. The sentry would be found at dawn.

"Darling," she said swiftly, "listen to me now, and don't interrupt until I've finished.

"I got you into this. The whole thing is my fault. I thought I knew so much, from seven years of reading and planning, and I've been an utter fool. Maybe they're right, maybe I belong with the Discards—with the other Discards. . . . No, don't speak, Lucas.

"I can't go back and give myself up now—you wouldn't let me, would you?"

He looked his answer.

"I thought as much. I wish I could do it, though. I—I wouldn't want to live, if living meant the Discard Reservation forever. They'd kill me quickly and humanely. They'd have the right to do that, as they don't have the right to kill us off when they find we're Discards, because they're government officials, and the laws providing capital punishment for murder have never been legally repealed, just dropped into abeyance.

"It would be so much easier. If I could only know that you were safe, that you were back in your own room and nobody would ever know about anything that has happened between us—"

In the half-light he caught her hands and held them fast. He tried to laugh, and the laughter turned into a groan.

"Any more of this," he muttered fiercely, "and I *will* believe there's something wrong with your mind. My poor ignorant darling, don't you know anything about other people's feelings? If you had only been the stranger who came to me for help, I couldn't let you go to your death while I washed my hands of you—and now . . ."

He snatched her to him tightly.

"Now, if either of us must die, then we'll die together. But I'm not going to give up, while there's the remotest chance."

"But you said there was none. We can't get through the fence—we can't pilot even a copter, let alone a jet—"

"We can start, and keep going as far as we can. Are you a good walker?"

"I walked to your quarters from our reservation, and I wasn't tired."

And stopped on the way to shoot your waythrough, he thought ruefully. Aloud, he said: "And I used to go on long hikes just for fun when I was a boy. Come on."

The night was clear, but luckily the moon had set. They struck a brisk pace, walking on the grass that edged the road, to hush their footsteps. They did not speak. *Our first walk together, and doubtless our last*, Lucas thought stoically. Every minute he expected a figure to loom up before them—some

early-arriving service worker, some engineer with duties in the small hours. There would be no sentry coming to the Discard Reservation for the morning shift, for their quarters were at the other end of the Project. But he had no idea how many others might be abroad at this time, and if they did reach the outer fence, that would inevitably be the end—daylight would find them vainly trying to discover a way through.

But they did reach it, unchallenged. It towered far above them, and it was a double fence, obviously alive. There were no lights and no sentries, because it was sufficient in itself for anyone foolhardy enough to attempt to enter or leave the Project without authorization. They stopped half a dozen feet from it and looked at each other with eyes grown accustomed to the dark.

Perhaps it was just as well that there seemed no possible way of getting through or over the fence; how far would they have got on the other side of it, on foot?

Through or over. A shock almost physical went through him. Could they get under?

He approached as near as he dared and knelt down to see better. The fence was built on the bare earth, not on neoconcrete as he had feared. If he had some digging implement—there might have been something in the machine shop that would have served; but could they have got here as quickly if they had had a burden to carry? His briefcase was burden enough.

Asta had come to kneel beside him; hastily he told her what had occurred

to him. She stood up again and looked around them.

"Lucas!" She clutched his shoulder. "Over there—what's that?"

"That" was a small boxlike structure some 20 feet away. Of course: occasional repairs would be necessary, and tool-chests would be stationed here and there along the line to save the workers from having to carry their kits with them. Lucas blessed the political lag which induced all governmental projects to keep on using old-fashioned methods that provided jobs for voters; in a private enterprise all upkeep would have been done by automation.

The box was padlocked, and made of metal. If only he hadn't persuaded Asta to leave the laser gun in the laboratory! He voiced his regret aloud.

"But I didn't!" she cried. "I brought it along."

He thought he knew why. Asta wasn't going to let them be captured, either of them. And she was right; he was glad she hadn't obeyed him, though nothing would have made him tell her so.

The ruby beam of light pierced the top of the tool-chest easily. It cooled in a minute and he could wrench the lid off. There were two battery-powered shovels among the tools.

They started five feet away from the fence, and dug down until they were sure it was safe, then began tunneling. In ten minutes, with the fast shovels eating away the dirt, they were on the other side of the fence.

Away off on the eastern horizon the sky was beginning to grey.

There was open country all around them—the Project reserve was big

enough to be far removed from the nearest of the belt-cities that covered most of the Earth: And it was prairie country—no woods, no hills, no rivers, and no roads.

They were little better off than before they had crossed the fence. The evidence of their flight was plain; as soon as either of them was missed they could quickly be traced and hunted down.

And the grey sky was turning gold; a thin upper slice of the rising sun dazzled their eyes.

There was nothing else to do, so they trudged on. To escape the sun in their eyes, they turned south. Doggedly probing his memory, Lucas vaguely recollected that both the plane and the could go, the farther they would probably be from the reservation. But to travel almost due west from his starting point; therefore the farther south they could go, the farther they would probably be from the reservation. But to every point of the compass all they could see was the level, open plain.

They were both beginning to tire now, the man as well as the girl; they kept going by sheer will, but sooner or later there would be a let-down in the excitement that sustained them, and exhaustion would set in. They must find a refuge soon, or wait like run-down robots to be collected and swooped back to their doom.

There were no ceiling clocks now to tell the time, but the sun had risen fully and the pursuit must have begun. They both walked with ears strained for the sound of an approaching plan.

Suddenly a thought struck Lucas. He stopped dead.

"How utterly stupid!" he exclaimed. "Of course—it's the only thing we can do!"

Astra gazed at him, bewildered.

"Don't you see? They'll be coming after us by air—probably in a copter, because a turbojet would have to fly too high to spot us. It wouldn't do any good for us to separate—they don't know yet whether we're together or not; they may not even connect my disappearance with yours, since they have no reason to associate us."

"I wouldn't leave you, anyway—unless it would save you instead of me."

"Or I you, for the same reason. Well, then, what will they be looking for? One man, nondescript appearance, ordinary clothes. One woman, in a grey smock and with silver hair."

"You're *not* nondescript, darling, but we'll let that pass. You mean if they see two men together they'll think it couldn't be us?"

"No, they could guess you could get hold of men's clothes, and you can't change your hair."

"Then what?"

"We must be two women. And your hair must be hidden."

"But how? We have nothing to do anything with of that sort."

"Look around you, Asta. What do you see?"

"See? Nothing but grass."

"Yes, grass—miles of it, good and long and tough. Hurry; we'll have to pick a lot of it, and fast."

She frowned in puzzlement, but set to work with him, tearing the grass in bunches from the ground.

When they had two big piles of it,

Lucas started plaiting it. Ludicrously he had a memory of his earliest childhood, of learning this art with plastic strips in a nursery school. This was a task which, properly done, would take hours; they must do the best they could in whatever time they had. Their one hope was that the Project would send out only one plane to search for them, and that by luck that plane would search first in some other direction than south.

When he had made dozens of five-strand plaits of grass, he began weaving them together horizontally and vertically. There was not nearly enough of the loose woven stuff to pass muster on a level view, but from above the effect might get by. He took the light cloak he had given Asta, and between them they managed to tear off the sleeves and split the rest of it lengthwise.

"Roll up your trousers as far as they'll go, Asta," he ordered. "They're too big for you, and you can do it easily. I'll do the same. Now drape your half of the cloak around your waist; we'll use the straps from my briefcase, and the sleeves for belts, and tie them together with grass. I want us to be old women, because old women always wear skirts, while young ones often don't."

"And what do we do with these mats you've woven, or whatever they are?"

"The same idea—they'll be caps or bonnets. You haven't been out in the world, but you've seen crowds on tridimens, haven't you? A long time ago everybody, young and old, and both sexes, used to wear head coverings they called hats; but nowadays it's only the

old who like something over their heads to keep off the sun or the cold.

"There—we must look like complete freaks; but from above we're two old women—stoop, if we hear a plane, let your shoulders droop, and limp a little—making our way across the prairie."

"And just what would two old women be doing, making their way on foot across the prairie?"

"On the death tour, of course."

"The death tour?"

"That right—you couldn't be expected to know. They don't like to publicize it. It's a—let's call it a movement, that has spread through the whole Federation these last few years; it reached our Union two or three years ago. It's illegal, of course—or I'd better call it extra-legal, because nobody wants to recognize and encourage it by passing laws about it.

"You seem to have read a lot of history, Asta, so I'm sure you know that our life-span is immensely longer than it was in the last century. We live on and on, and most diseases have ceased to exist, and the ills that used to be considered a part of old age have been completely eliminated. So, except by accident, we usually don't die till we literally wear ourselves out. Most people *want* to live just as long as they can. But there are some who simply grow tired of living—get 'deathly,' I heard someone say once, just the way we grow sleepy.

"Then why don't they just commit suicide? Often there are moral or religious scruples in the way. So about nine or ten years ago, somebody—in the East Asia Union, I think—made the

first death tour—walked quietly out of his home, and kept walking away from it till he dropped. Eskimos used to do that in the Arctic before they were all civilized. The thing spread like an exploding rocket. The children and grandchildren try to stop it, of course, so now there are secret groups of old people who get together and take pledges and make their plans. And usually they set out together, in twos and threes, when for some reason the vigilance around them is relaxed and they see a good opportunity.

“So that’s what they’ll think we are, from the plane—I hope.”

He had been talking under a sort of compulsion, to distract Asta’s thoughts and his own. For a strong foreboding had seized him, and he expected any minute to hear that fatal sound above. What chance really was there that they would get away with this desperate haphazard masquerade? Suppose, even if the pilot were half-deceived, he should ground the plane to make sure the two old women on their death tour did not conceal the refugees for whom he was hunting?

And then they both heard it, far off, coming nearer every second.

The pilot had seen them. The copter checked, it circled, it hovered. And it began to descend.

There was nowhere to run to. There was nothing to do but stand there and wait.

It landed on the prairie, 50 feet away from them. The pilot climbed out and started toward them. He walked without hurrying; he knew they could not escape. And as soon as he glimpsed

them from close by he would see the makeshift disguise.

Asta did not even glance in Lucas Broome’s direction. Without a second’s hesitation she drew out the laser gun and shot the pilot through the heart. He fell, twitched, and was still.

Lucas looked at her; she was trembling and her face was white.

“I had to do it, Lucas—I had to!” she cried.

“I know.” He felt dazed with shock. There were men once, he knew, who would have taken such things in their stride—only it would have been they, not their shrinking women, who would have done the shooting. But Lucas Broome, besides being all his life a retiring student, had been born in 2007, into a world without war, almost without violent crime, almost without disease. Except for his great-grandfather, who had died in his sleep at 109, he had never seen a corpse.

And for Asta too, he knew, this must be the second dead body in her experience—and both of them she had nerved herself to kill. She was a murderer twice over, but she was as vulnerable as himself. By tacit consent they veered in a wide arc past the pilot lying on the blood-stained grass—too far to know if they could recognize him.

And without a word they found themselves beside the grounded plane.

Whether he knew how to fly a copter or not, he *had* to. Where, if he could get it up and keep it up at all? Anywhere. Away.

It bumped, it bucked, it fought back, it wobbled sickeningly. He would have done better in a turbojet, where there would be automatic controls. But

somehow, threatening every minute to crash, it stayed up. He steered it by trial and error. When he found out how, he pointed it due south.

There, if he could hold out long enough and there was enough fuel in the tanks, was the Latin Speaking Union—old Central and South America, combined with Spain, Portugal, and Italy. It belonged to the Federation, of course, as did all the Unions; but it had kept its tradition of separatism and individualism. It granted extradition grudgingly, and refused it often; and because harmony and unity were the life-blood of the Federation, it was never pushed beyond a firm refusal. "Lit out for LSU" was the common guess when the occasional rebel vanished before the law could pounce on him. The refugees could never come home again, of course, but that was of small moment to most of them. It would be of small moment to them, either—if they could get there, and if two murders, and the flight of a geneticist who knew so many of the secrets of Project XX, would not be too much for even the sturdy insistence on sovereignty of the LSU to stomach.

The early short-tour helicopters, with their limited fuel supply, would have been brought down far on the wrong side of their objective. Even these tanks were almost empty, and the sun had turned toward the west, when they saw below them the east-and-west river that they hoped would be the Rio Grande. They had been flying over belt-line cities after the first few minutes, and more of them lined both shores of the river. Lucas kept the copter's nose

pointed south until at last the desert began.

Somehow he got the copter slanted downward, somehow he spiraled, taxied bumpily for what seemed forever, and at last came to a stop. They staggered out, amazed that neither the plane nor they themselves had been shattered into small bits.

And simultaneously they realized that they were famished. Excitement had kept them numb, but neither of them had eaten since the night before. Nor had they slept since the night before that.

There was no immediate help for the one need, no use struggling against the other. They might be found and captured, they might even be mistaken in thinking they had crossed the border between the two Unions. But they climbed back into the copter, huddled together, and in five minutes they were sound asleep. They had taken off their grotesque drapings, and now the torn pieces of the cloak served as their only coverlet, but they were too tired to care.

It was almost morning again when Lucas awoke, shivering in the night chill. Asta was still sleeping, her head with its beautiful silver crown of silky hair lying against his shoulder. He sat there, cramped and aching, but unwilling to move and waken her. Starving and thirsty, every limb protesting, he looked down at the delicate face, the moving breast, the long slender thighs of his strange love, and a thrill of pure happiness pierced him. She opened her eyes and smiled. He bent to find her lips. Her arms reached up and held him close to her.

It was broad daylight when they

headed north to the city strung along the river.

Weak with hunger, they made slow progress. They reached its outskirts with almost their last strength. On the steps of a whitewashed cabin a fat dark man, a huge hat shading him against the sun, sat happily munching a tortilla, stopping every few bites to up-end a jug of dark red wine.

Asta shut her eyes and hung heavily on his arm. The fat man retreated far off in a haze. Lucas gazed at him appealingly. "*Señor, haga Usted el favor—*" he began in his halting Spanish. That was the last he knew till he looked up to find himself and Asta both lying on blankets in the shade of a tree, while the fat man and an equally fat woman were solicitously trickling wine into their mouths.

Pedro and Anna Gomez. Lucas spoke hardly any Spanish, Asta none, the Mexicans knew no English. They were rescued, and fed, and cared for anxiously and generously. They could not understand the questions, and Lucas dared not volunteer any explanation of their plight, lest in his ignorance of the language he say too much, too near the truth. He left the Gomezes under the impression (he hoped) that they were survivors of a plane crash. He could not offer to repay his hosts for their kindness; he had nothing to give them. If they had actually escaped, if they were really free, his mother's locket and his father's watch would have to provide the means for their support until he could find some way to earn a living. All he could do was venture a few garbled words of thanks, and ask the way to the *casa municipal*,

and *ayuntamiento*. There was no choice but to give themselves up to the local authorities; otherwise they would be turned over, by the first observer less naive than these good-hearted peasants, to the nearest consul of the ESPU. It was impossible to conceal themselves, without money or resources, without fluency in Spanish. Somebody in the higher ranks of officialdom would certainly speak English, and Lucas must tell their story in a form to back up their appeal for sanctuary.

Pedro Gomez took them to the city hall himself, in a rattletrap broken-down ground car that had to be 20 years old at least, since that was when the Federation's Automotive Collective stopped manufacturing new ground cars except for a few rich eccentrics and a few people whose blood-pressure forbade travel by air. This must have been easily the most exciting event of Pedro's placid life, and perhaps now he would find out more to satisfy his curiosity; perhaps also he would be rewarded when the *Senor* and *Senora* could direct someone to their wrecked plane and communicate with the ESPU. All Espuans were rich, everyone knew that.

He was disappointed. The *Senor* and *Senora* were greeted without surprise. The *alcalde*, like the *alcaldes* of every town across the border, had received urgent visiphone messages from the north. Pedro Gomez was dismissed with compliments on his patriotism in apprehending and bringing in two dangerous criminals.

The section of the LSU called Mexico, Lucas Broome decided gloomily

as he sat in his uncomfortable cell, was entirely too near the District of the ESPU called the United States of North America. It had been infected by the law-abiding conformity of its northern neighbor, and had lost the romantic chivalry for the persecuted which could still be relied on farther south and in Spain. The *alcalde* did indeed speak English—very good English; he was a graduate of the University of California. But he did not even listen to Lucas's carefully planned account. He was delighted that the honor of having captured such an important quarry had fallen to his small border town. Lucas and Asta were securely locked into separate cells and the authorities in the north were notified.

But no insignificant mayor had the right to turn them over to the ESPU against their will. They had the right of appeal to the LSU courts, and if the highest court in that Union ruled against them, to the Supreme Judicial Body of the Federation itself. All they needed was a competent lawyer to conduct the case against their extradition.

The only trouble was that lawyers, competent or not, have to be paid; and neither Lucas nor Asta had one *peso* to their names.

Unless—

He had been only six months with Project XX, but already there was credited to him a very impressive sum of accrued salary. This might be made into a test case to find out whether the Project staff ever really got their putative pay at all; and with that aspect to the fore, powerful influence would be exerted in his behalf by other staff

members wondering about the same thing. Lawyers with big fees pending might be willing to work on a contingency basis.

Lucas banged on his cell bars with his tin basin till a keeper came. By sheer force of insistence he was conducted again to the *alcalde's* office. There, with hints of vast sums at issue and of proper recompense to officials found helpful to important members of top-secret departments of ESPU, he gained permission to visiphone to the *cuerpo de abogados* in the District capital, and from this Bar Association to be put in touch with the best lawyer it could recommend.

In a sort of fever of precision and aggressiveness, he bullied this high-ranking advocate into flying at once to the prison to see him. The *alcalde* was so impressed that he granted the use of his own office for the conference, and even had Asta, pale but firm-lipped, brought from her cell to wait there with them.

When Tomás Agramente arrived, Lucas saw at once that this was just the lawyer he had dreamed of. Agramente showed his mettle immediately by dislodging the *alcalde*, with many compliments, and shutting him out from the discussion. Then he turned to Lucas and said, in perfect English: "Now, my friend, you will tell me this situation from beginning to end, omitting nothing and altering nothing."

Lucas did. Asta confirmed him and added her individual portions of the story. Agramente listened in silence. There was a long pause while he sat, deep in thought. They watched him,

their hearts in their mouths. He cleared his throat and spoke at last.

"This Project XX— why is it so called?"

"Because it is top-secret, I suppose."

"Or because it conceals—a double cross?"

Lucas gasped.

"I never thought—now you've said it, I wonder—"

"Exactly. So let us find out."

"You *Señorita*—" He turned to Asta. "You will stay here in the LSU. But not in prison—oh, no. I shall go your bond myself, and my wife will be charmed to have you as our guest while I conduct what I am sure will be a successful fight against having you extradited. For murder is murder, my dear young lady, and though you could perhaps claim self-defense in both instances—and though I understand northern juries are almost as prone as are we in the south to go easy on attractive young women who have brief blackouts during which strange accidents occur—still, under your peculiar circumstances, I fear you are not even a citizen of your Union, but merely—forgive me—a sort of property of this double-crossing Project. Do you understand?"

"I understand," said Asta steadily. "And I *didn't* have any blackout, and I didn't kill either of those men in self-defense, unless it was self-defense for a soldier, such as they had in the old wars, to kill in order to escape from the enemy who had taken him prisoner."

"Well put, *Señorita*, but you will leave the strategy of your defense to me. Where is your laser gun now?"

Asta looked startled. She reached into a trouser pocket and her hand came out empty.

"It must be back in the copter," she said. "I must have dropped it when we—while I was asleep."

"We shall find it when we get the helicopter, then. That is safe—from what you tell me, you landed far beyond the town. There will be a minor charge of theft against you, of course, for the gun belongs to your government."

"As for you, Dr. Broome, you have also stolen a plane. But that, I think, will be forgotten in the face of the major issue."

"You mean my violation of my contract in leaving the Project?"

"I mean," said Agramente, "the charges you are going to bring before the Federation that one of its constituent Unions is practicing chattel slavery."

"But—but don't you too have such a project? I understood that all the Unions did."

"We do indeed have a research department that is interested in the improvement of the human race. I do not know all its methods—I am no scientist, and I would not understand them. But I do know that it has nothing like virtual enslavement of its staff, or this—this Reservation of Discards from which you rescued the *Señorita* Asta."

The lawyer watched shrewdly as astonishment, anger, resolution, and regret swept successively over Lucas Broome's countenance.

"I took an oath," the geneticist said slowly. "I swore never to reveal the secrets of the Project."

"My dear man," the lawyer objected, "surely you know that an oath enforced by deceit is not valid. If you had suspected that the Project included the lifelong imprisonment of innocent, helpless, unfortunate beings, would you have taken it?"

"Never!"

"Well, then—"

"But it's my own Union—I'd feel like a traitor."

"You are a citizen of the English Speaking Peoples' Union, to be sure. But you are also a citizen of the Federation of Earth, and you owe your first allegiance to that.

"Let me console you a little. I am quite positive that this disgusting crime is not known to the responsible authorities of your own Union. I am even sure that the greater part of the staff of the Project itself feels as outraged by it as you and I. But they also are helpless; you alone had the audacity and courage to escape."

"I should not have had either," said Lucas, "if it had not been for Asta. She is the heroine of this affair."

"Oh, Lucas, no!" Asta flushed. "I could never have done it without you—I told you I had hoped and planned for seven years, but until you came I didn't dare do a thing."

At Agramente's smile Lucas felt himself flushing too. He said hastily: "But all this—fighting extradition, appealing to the Federation—even living, while we do it—it's going to take a lot of money. And I haven't any, unless you can collect what I have due me in salary."

"That is another thing. I know something of your laws, and I am cer-

tain that it is illegal for any governmental unit to withhold the pay due its employees. That is something else that should be brought before the proper authorities. I shall collect the money for you—for everybody on your staff—and perhaps solid damages as well. Until then, do not worry; I shall be your banker. I am prosperous, I can well afford to advance your expenses—and to wait for my fee, which will be large, I assure you. And I will tell you candidly that I undertake this case not only out of indignation at this terrible offense, though I feel that strongly. I have, I confess, political ambitions. This case may very well be of the greatest assistance to them; it will make your advocate, as well as yourselves, a figure of worldwide reputation. So, Dr. Broome, do you accept my instructions?"

"I do."

"**I** DO. . .," LUCAS BROOME said again, ten months later. This time he had just heard the same words from Asta, lovely in white and crowned with flowers. Things had moved fast, once Agramente had got them started. The Federation, in anger and alarm, had acted swiftly and firmly. With the facilities at its command, it had been easy to prove that the whole system of Discards, of peonage of the staff, of withholding of their pay, was the work of just three men—men at the very top, who had been in command from the beginning. Zimmerman was one of them.

In the face of the interunion scandal,

of the revelation of the crimes and the imposition of severe punishment, Asta's killing of the sentry and the helicopter pilot had been dismissed as justifiable homicide.

In the end, the Federation itself took over the genetic research projects of all the Unions. Failures and mistakes there must be, in experimentation on genes and chromosomes, but under Federation law, which superseded the ordinances of any Union, euthanasia was legal. Henceforth monsters and abnormals would be mercifully destroyed as soon as their condition became manifest.

A week after Asta was freed by the court, she and Lucas were married. They were returning, after all, to the former Project XX—now the ESPU branch of the Genetic Control Project of the Federation of Earth. Once more Lucas Broome was on its scientific staff, with Dr. Hubbard as the new director and everybody moved up a few notches. No liaison officer was needed any more for recruiting—the applications far outran the vacancies, now that it was no longer necessary to go into seclusion from society for five years.

There would be no future Discards, but something must be done about those already in existence. Hubbard appointed Asta—Asta, with a last name of her own now, a citizen like any other—co-ordinator for the social workers, Federation employees, who took over closing of the Discard Reservation. The more nearly normal persons were compensated for their lost years and readjusted to living and working as ordinary human beings—several of them in clerical and service

positions in the Project itself. The severely handicapped were sent to Rehabilitation Institutes, the out-and-out monstrosities to hospitals. The fences around the Discard Reservation and around the entire Project Territory were torn down, the Reservation taken over as living quarters for maintenance workers. The sentries, who had been Union police, were given new assignments.

As a married couple—and now most of the staff, no longer shut off from society, was made up of workers with wives or husbands—Asta and Lucas were given a suite in the Professional Building. They settled into it after a month's honeymoon, during which Lucas took occasion to visit Harvard and drop in on an abjectly apologetic Dean Schofield. Sitting on a summer evening on the balcony outside their living-room, the Broomes watched the moon rise over the trees that bordered the Project garden.

"Happy, darling?" Lucas asked, watching the young face under the waves of silver hair.

"So happy, Lucas. If only—"

"If only what?"

"Dearest"—her voice grew earnest—"I've got to know. You can have access to the records now. No matter how bad it is, I must know—we both must. We'll never dare to have a child until we do—and I do want children, don't you? Even if it's so bad we mustn't have them, it would be better to know."

"What in the world are you talking about, sweetheart?"

"I want to know why, when I was fifteen, I was transferred to the Discard

(Continued on page 53)

STAR LEVEL

William Rotsler is a science fiction fan of more than two decades, a living legend to those who know him: a superlative cartoonist (one of his cartoons appears in Harlan Ellison's Partners in Wonder), a photographer, film director, full-time bohemian and one-time Arty Feller. In the last few years he's added yet another string to his bow: science fiction writer. We published his "Bohassian Learns" in our July, 1971 issue. Now he returns to pose a perplexing question: how can alien intelligences, forced by circumstances to assert control over human beings, prove that their intentions are honorable?

WILLIAM ROTSLER

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

REED CARRAHER LOOKED into the great yawning mouth of the two millimeter Colt laser and had a silly thought: Why wasn't his life flashing before his eyes?

He looked up at the dark visor covering the face of the Patrolman and said, "Yes?" He turned his head deliberately and looked at the second blackclad Patrolman standing by the door. "May I help you in some way?"

"Don't move. Don't even think about moving, mudballer!" the nearest Patrolman snapped.

Be mild. Be slightly frightened. Be nervous. Be confused.

"Are you confusing me with someone you want?" he asked, with just the right amount of concern in his voice.

"Put your hands on top of your head!" the Patrolman growled.

Stay calm.

"Of course, officer. But I don't see what this has to do w—"

"Quiet!"

Reed Carraher was very still. He let his face be mildly confused, with an expression that said, 'They'll get this straightened out soon. They're only doing their duty. Be a good citizen and cooperate.'

"Whattya think, Bart?" the Patrolman with the drawn gun asked.

"Looks close enough, I guess. Let's take him in. He's the closest yet and we can have the night out in Ares."

"Get up!" A rough gesture with the hand in a metal mesh glove.

"But—"

"Shut your flapping hatch!" A flick of the laser barrel indicated the direction he wanted Carraher to go.

"Cuffs?" the other Patrolman asked.

The one with the gun snorted. "Him? Hah!"

Outside a sleek dark Patrol flyer waited. Carraher climbed into the back and the laser never left him. The flyer lifted, slid angularly towards the airlock at the top of the dome, where it

hovered while the great gates slid back. Then they were leaping out into the dark Martian sky.

The dome cluster of Bradbury fell away and they were streaking away over the strip mines towards Ares Center a thousand kilometers away. Carraher knew they were going there because there was nothing in between.

You have less than two hours. I have calculated speed and direction. Observe and be ready to react.

"Listen, what's this all about, officers? Where are you taking me? I have a dinner appointment with the General Manager of Icemountain. I'll have to be back for that, you know."

The two blackclad men in front did not answer.

"What's it all about? I haven't done anything. It *can't* be for that traffic control ticket I got at Northaxe last month. I know I've been meaning to send them a credit memo, but . . . well, I mean, *two* Patrolmen for *that* . . . well, it's silly."

"It's not a traffic violation, citizen, as you well know," the pilot said in disgust.

"What is it then?" Carraher asked. "Come on, you can tell me, can't you?"

Put some whine in it.

"Can't you?"

The other Patrolman shrugged his shoulders and turned his head to look through his dark shiny visor at the prisoner. "They want you at headquarters. A guy named Compton got carved by a laser." Carraher felt himself being scrutinized. "You fit the description close enough." He snorted. "They said you were dangerous. Those desk pilots probably think their grand-



mothers are dangerous. They've been stranded here so long they've forgotten how to handle citizens." He snorted again and turned contemptuously towards the front.

Point Four is directly south three hundred kilometers. Exterior temperature is twenty-one degrees. Altitude two thousand. There's another aircar two kilometers to the Northwest, headed for Grandcanal.

Carraher concentrated on the back of the head of the Second Patrolman. He felt the tenseness in his muscles that was not so much a tenseness as an awareness.

He funneled. He channeled. He pushed the energy out of him.

The Patrolman nodded his head, caught himself, shook his head, then dropped his chin to his chest.

"Hey, Bart, don't slag off now. Keep an eye on that mudballer, will you? Hey! Dammit, if you're going to sleep the rest of the way slap some cuffs on that guy, will you?"

Carraher's gaze went to the head of the pilot. The Patrolman shook his head, grumbling and swearing. The flyer swerved and dropped, but the black-clad pilot caught it and brought it up again.

"Goddammit, Bart—"

His head dropped to one side and the flyer slanted off to the South. Carraher jumped forward and seized the controls, righting the ship over the limp form of the Patrolman.

Carraher swore as he tried to steer the ship with the unconscious body in the way. He stabbed in the stable flight button then tugged and yanked for several minutes before he could get the

heavy body over the seat and dumped on the floor in back.

'What good is it?' he thought. 'They'll be after me all the harder now.'

They were inefficient. They did not report your capture. They were overconfident. But your disposal of them was adequate. Unless you desire to kill them, they will awaken with no memory of where or when you escaped.

'I'll keep roughly on this course for another hundred kilometers, angling towards Point Four. Then I'll land, reset the flyer and let them wake up somewhere up near Ares,' he thought, 'unless you have some alternative.'

Negative. Once you found yourself in this situation it was the best course to follow.

"You're implying I botched the whole thing, aren't you?" Carraher said aloud. 'You know I had no choice but to cut Compton and run,' he thought angrily.

There were choices. You did not reserve sufficient time to analyze. You gave them a look at you, enough of an identification to pick up all likely suspects.

'Well, why didn't you warn me? That's your job!'

My tasks are well known to me. I was working on a primary function, that of emptying Compton's mind. You had administered the drug, all you had to do was guardian duty.

"How can I concentrate with you using my mind like that? Don't you know what it's like?" Carraher shook his head in irritation. 'It's like the docks at Sahara Central,' he thought viciously. 'Information going through like torn up newspapers in a hurricane.'

Chunks. Gas. Lightning. And all the time it's like you're screaming in my ear, forcing it out of him, gouging, prying, cutting.' "And I'm supposed to keep watch! Hah!"

You've done it before. Winecup, on Ganymede. Wilson. Haldeman in that crash on Gilgamesh. Krupp in New York. Coulson in Calcutta. Vados in Sardinia. Craig on Little Zeus. All over the moons of Jupiter, from Amalthea out to Vishnu and Thor. Here. Earth. Lindsay on Luna.

'I know, I know,' "I know!" 'But it never happens to you! You don't know what it's like, standing in the middle of that river, that flood of thought, of words, of memory—!'

That is true. Perhaps I was hasty in condemning you. When we return to Base I will not counter a request for transfer.

'You son of a bitch.' "You bastard." 'You know what this means to me. You're blackmailing me, you popping mind-sucking frelk! You know it better than anyone in the Universe.'

That is true. Not even the Master spent as much time in your mind as I have. He merely made the preliminary survey. I have lived in it.

'Do you find it comfortable?' Carraher wondered sarcastically.

As well as any I have tried. Would you be comfortable in a spacesuit constructed for a child?

"Thank you, Secret Master of the Universe," Carraher said.

You are being sarcastic. It is a common fault of your kind. Faced with a problem that you find insoluble, you resort to irony, humor, sarcasm, bitterness, apathy, fear and anger. They are

primitive reactions and seldom solve anything.

"Were you always pompous or did you study it?"

Logic. Reason. Experience. Synthesis. Evaluation. Action.

'Yes, I know. The path to knowledge. I can't knock it, but its bare bones can be a bore, IOK. You can be a bore, sometimes. IOX was a bore. IOR was something of a bloody bore.'

And IOZ?

Carraher turned to the unconscious Patrolman slumped in the next seat and said, "Do you know the trouble with having someone live in your mind twenty-four hours a day? It's like a house guest that looks in your desk and in your dresser and reads your mail. That's what's wrong with having a xeron in your head. In case you should ask."

IOZ gave you exotic dreams.

"I know IOZ gave me exotic dreams," Carraher snapped. "I liked her best and I don't know why Base changed us."

You are aware we have no sexual differential. Why do you persist in labeling?

'Because she was a she! She thought like a she, she acted like a she. You are a he. IOX was an it. IOR was a maybe.' "Get it?"

It is at moments like this that I question my decision to become a Warder. Despite the Plan, there are times I sense that xeron and man shall never grow together.

"There are times like this," Carraher said, punching out codes on the telex, "that I question my own goddamn sanity for letting one of you alien bas-

ketballs into my dome." "I really do. You are nothing but trouble."

Why do you persist in the pretense of anger? It is not logical nor practical. I know your true feelings. You are proud of your association with us. The instant we sense a significant lessening of interest and dedication we will confer and act.

"Do you make me blow my head off or do I just go quietly insane?"

That is unworthy of you. You are quite aware of the decontamination procedures. Honorable retirement on any of three worlds and nine moons. A life of leisure and happiness. Waiting for you at any time you desire. That was our pledge.

"Unless I get cut down first." "Or caught. Or snagged by the Patrol's Psych Group and my brain drained."

Your brain will not be drained. We promise you that.

"Yesh," Carraher, said gloomily, "that's what I'm afraid of."

Your continual pessimism did not stop you from accepting our offer.

"So I believed you!" "Maybe you hypnotized me, I don't know. You convinced me you wanted to help man."

Intelligence. Man is not the only intelligent being.

"Okay, okay." "Okay." "So most of mankind would think I was a traitor and the rest would think I was insane. Helping an alien scoop out all the knowledge in carefully selected humans."

We need to know certain things. We do not know what we need to know. You and the others help. In the long view you realize we are correct.

"Sometimes I do." "Sometimes I don't." "It's weird having someone live in your head like this!" "It's not natural!"

It is natural to us. We use scores of host races.

"Well . . . Like the joke says, it seemed like a good idea at the time."

Humans are a constant source of wonder. Their reactions are so unpredictable at times. There is always a sense of danger about you.

"Are you calling us savages?"

Such judgements are highly subjective. To us you are savages. To the Thula we are savages, though they are too polite to say so. You merely seem dangerous because of your unpredictability. You have come remarkably far in a very short time.

"Thanks, loads." "I'm going down now."

The flyer sank abruptly and almost immediately Ares Control called, asking why they had dropped off the scopes. Carraher ignored them and swept to a landing on a rocky stretch in a wide, shallow crater. Working as fast as he could he pulled the unconscious pilot back into the seat, so that he might awaken somewhere and discover that their prisoner had simply "vanished." He grabbed an airmask and tanks and moved to the door.

He punched the takeoff button and leaped to the rocky, sandy soil. He did not look up as the flyer jumped skyward. It would sit down four more times, then clear the destination board and simply go west until the pilot woke up.

Carraher started walking and the xeron said in his mind, *That way. The*

lithe young spaceman turned slightly and continued walking, adjusting the airmask more tightly to his face.

The air was thin and cold and the *xeron* turned up his body heat to compensate, but kept the simulated fever from interfering with other body functions. It cost calories and would need adjusting later, but it would save time and energy.

Carraher was walking for over an hour when the warning sounded in his head.

Flyer at 175° and coming fast.

Carraher trusted the *xeron's* experienced use of his own sensing devices and jumped for the curve of a crater lip, hiding in the shadow. He watched the yellow dot of a commercial flyer move across the dark blue sky a few kilometers off.

Course computed. Wait until out of sight and then continue.

Carraher watched until the ship disappeared beyond a crater edge, then heaved himself up and started out again.

The sand dragged at his feet and the airmask made his chest hurt. "Do something about the hunger, will you?" he said aloud. The hollow feeling died away and his thirst calmed. Carraher knew the toil it would take on his body to have all the warning signals suppressed, but he had no choice.

When night came he curled up in a ball and hugged himself. 'Put me to sleep for a couple of hours,' he thought at the *xeron*. The sleep was instantaneous and dreamless. He was almost instantly awake again, but he knew too well the terrible efficiency the *xeron* had over many of his body functions.

He rose and his eyes seemed to penetrate the darkness better and after three hours tiny Phobos rose to become a pale dot in the black jewel case of the sky. Carraher fought the boredom by having IOK take over the motor and visual functions and to continue walking his body across the night desert while he luxuriated in fantasy.

Give me Earth, he said. Tahiti before the white man. But this time throw in a few white women.

Your capacity for trivial escape mechanisms amazes me. If you wish merely to be distracted from this purely mechanical act of walking I could familiarize you with Acanthocephala or Coelenterata. They are most interesting. I have been learning about these parasitic worms and various jellyfish from IOG, who is with Bergin in the Mozambique Channel.

"IOK, will you for Christ's sake, just never mind!" 'I want quiet and coolness and ease. And maybe a woman. I haven't had a woman since Chris's Place.' "Just give me Tahiti with the changes, huh?"

You are very uninformed in the sciences. You do not have all the atomic weights correct, for instance. I could coach you. I'll cool your interior sense and keep up the exterior warmth while—
"IOK!"

Very well.

The dark bowl of night grew blacker then lightened and Carraher heard the soft slap-slap of waves. He turned from the blue dome and there were green trees, palms and wide-leaved tropical plants. The waves broke quietly on the wide white beaches, protected from the sea by the reefs. He heard children's

laughter and under the trees he saw the huts of a small village.

Beyond the trees the dark red cones of the volcanos rose, impossibly steep, their lower sides skirted heavily in dark green. Near him, playing in the surf were several brown-skinned young women, slim and sleek and naked, their long black hair like bird's wings, stuck to their shoulders and back. Their flesh was speckled with water jewels as they frolicked naked and unashamed beneath a sun that had yet to see a thermonuclear blast.

"Hello, Reed," a soft voice said near him, just barely heard above the sound of waves and laughter. Carraher turned and saw what he expected to see and hoped to see and thought he would never see again, except in the illusions of his mind.

"Hello, Mara."

They looked at each other for a long time and Carraher ran his eyes over the ripe perfection of her body, over the naked, tanned skin, over the full, firm breasts, over the flat, taut stomach, down the long, shapely legs.

Her eyes were the same, no matter what form he made her body. Usually deep violet, but in bright sunlight they could be blue. Last time, "on Earth," she had been slimmer, quicker, more demanding, running in the untouched forest, legs wet with dew, falling laughing in a meadow of flowers, opening her dress, reaching for him . . .

. . . dancing and flying in the Astrobubble on Station Two, weightless and gay, imaginary wings spreading wide, swooping and kissing, he in his black uniform trimmed with scarlet, she in a shimmering skintight that

changed colors . . .

. . . standing on the tip of Redrock with a sandstorm coloring the sunset with glory, not needing airmasks because IOK had given Mars a crisp, clean blanket of air . . . a fresh clean world all new and untouched . . .

. . . twisting and dipping, gods in space, perfect bodies as long as a comet, using the Solar System as a playground, dodging planets and laughing as they felt the flame of the Sun . . .

. . . naked in the water, in the fish and seaflowers and coral castles, never needing air, making love, playing games, swimming, diving, finding a lost temple of Ishtar in sunken Atlantis . . .

. . . Mara . . .

. . . again . . . not lost . . . alive . . . here . . .

Reed Carraher took the warmly smiling girl into his arms to kiss and the nearby maidens giggled in appreciation, their wet shiny breasts jiggling. He swept her up into his arms and started for the shore, knee-deep in the crystal waters. She snuggled into his shoulder as they went up onto the beach, towards the cool shade, towards the bower of flowers, towards the flood of love words, silent and spoken.

It was going to be a very nice walk to Point Four, Carraher thought. They both smiled at the voluptuous brown-skinned beauties and Reed walked across the fine sand of the coral beach and into the trees.

The bower was there, heavy with the incense of nature, and the wide soft bed of deep green moss. They looked at each other with shy smiles on their faces, lovers twice a hundred times yet

strangers, virgins on a new planet.

Reed touched her flesh, his fingertips tracing a romance across her golden flesh. Her great blonde cascade of hair spread out over the moss, over the world, a fine net of life and beauty and memory.

He lay next to her and she touched his lips, a fingertip tracery with her smile of love beyond. Her breasts were firm and smooth, with a hardening button in his palm, and her body arched towards him . . .

. . . night . . . torches and glistening flesh . . . a ring of dancers . . . music . . . moonlight on a world of water, silver and purple . . .

. . . warm days of sea and sun and sand, of fruit and love and laughter . . . seaweed forests and underwater coral sculpture . . . waves and fish and flowers.

. . . a simple, happy people, brown and naked and untouched.

. . . an innocent world . . .

. . . a new world . . .

. . . and Mara . . .

We are almost there.

The trees overhead shimmered and blurred. The silken skin, beaded with moisture and warm with love, slowly disappeared. The moss bed darkened. The sky was black, without stars, and then it was dark blue and a Martian day.

Carraher took another step and stopped, crying out with pain. "Hey! What the hell were you doing with my body! My knees are—ouch!—banged raw and my elbow—"

A Patrol craft approached us twice. I did not think it necessary to remove

you from your Dream while I hid your body.

"Did you have to be so rough?" Carraher examined his bloody elbow through a rip in his suit. He was aware of weakness and dehydration and a general soreness. His airmask chafed badly and his lips were split and dry.

They came over at high velocity. I had to reduce your body heat below the level of their infrared detectors. I am sorry if I have injured your flesh, but the alternative was not viable.

"Uh . . . okay, thanks. I know you did your best." "Thanks for those days with Mara, though. But I just asked for a variation. Just a few *zofitic* white women in with the regular natives, just for variety?"

If you would permit me to someday to indoctrinate you in the IOC-IOM disciplines you could contact the deeper portions of your mind and achieve a truer whole.

"In other words, you read me that I wanted Mara." "Is nothing sacred? How much do you peek and don't tell me? Are you going to say you know me better than myself?"

I am a Fourth Level adept, a moka in the IOC-IOM disciplines.

And that's the answer I deserve, I suppose, Carraher thought. "Where are we?"

Point Four is one kilometer straight ahead. They know we are here.

Carraher walked over a low ridge, the worn remnant of an ancient crater, and down into the inconspicuous jumble of rocks and mud cracks and craterlets that was the hidden entrance to Point Four.

That way. Into that crack. Stop. IOR will open the entrance.

'IOR's here? Who is he with? Uh, who is it, er, IOR with?'

Was that humor or indecisiveness?

'Aha! Something you can't understand?' Carraher grinned and then put his fingers to his cracked lips as he felt the blood flow. 'Damn!'

Interpretation of alien thought symbols is not yet perfection, for it differs from individual to individual.

'Maybe I have a place to hide in my own head,' Carraher thought quietly to himself.

Only if we permit it.

'Oh, will you open this goddamn hole?'

The ground yawned and dilated before him as rocks moved aside and cracks widened. Carraher walked down into the darkness and the rocks swung closed over his head. His eyes dilated quickly and he walked towards a darker rectangle to the left, then down a slanting corridor into darkness.

'Who else is here?' Carraher asked listlessly. The repair work on his body was going to be a bore, even with IOK's help.

IOR . . . IOT'moki . . . IOZ . . .

'IOZ?' Gladness and warmth welled up in Carraher. IOZ had been fun, like having a beautiful weekend guest, always considerate and friendly.

You are criticizing me?

'Goddamn it, IOK, will you stop listening to everything I think?'

You prefer IOZ? I find that difficult to comprehend. IOZ is only a Third Level adept. A moka, it is true, but only at the Third Level.

Carraher laughed. "Did I hurt your

nonexistent ego? Aw, poor baby . . ."

It is only logical that you would prefer the highest level adept. If you were able to accept a Fifth Level adept, even a barlwan, I should not question it. It would only be logical.

Carraher turned into the hatch at the end of the dark corridor and went through a silent decontamination room.

'There's a lot you have to learn about human relationships, IOK. Even about human-xeron relationships. All of you in your morrea nest better run it through the disciplines again.'

Yes, we have begun a trial discipline.

'Umm, fast.' "Which way?"

Right. The others wait in the central room.

Carraher walked confidently through the dim rooms, his physical pain blunted. "Who is IOZ with?"

A female of your race.

Before Carraher had much time to digest that information a hatch dilated and he stepped through into the bright light of the central room.

"Reed!" Carraher stared at the totally unfamiliar and totally familiar form of a well-built brunette in a gray jumpsuit.

'Mara! No . . . not Mara . . . you don't even look like Mara . . .'

"IOZ?"

"Yes!" the girl said, delight in her voice. Ignoring the two others, both men, the girl launched herself across the room at Reed Carraher and they embraced as old friends. She raised a shining, smiling face up to his and they kissed. One of the men sighed wearily and the other made a small, rather strangled sound.

"Hello, Reed," the brunettesaid. "I'm Mina. Mina Wallace."

"Hello, Mina . . . Hello, IOZ."

"Hello, Reed Carraher. It is a gladness that we meet again." The words came from Mina's soft red mouth but Reed immediately sensed the difference.

Are you finished?

"Let them alone, IOK," Mina said.

"Oh, very well," Reed heard himself say, "but let's get on with it."

"IOZ told me IOK was a drudge," Mina said.

"IOZ is no fool. IOK is a raincloud looking for a place to turn himself inside out."

Why do you insult me?

"Let them alone," Mina said, frowning up Reed's forehead.

"Yeah, let us alone," Reed said, tasting the blood on his lips again as he smiled. "I'm greeting an old-new friend."

"Let's get you started healing up," Mina said, smiling. "That hurts, kissing a mouth like that."

"It hurts on this end, too," Reed said.

Please. Salute the others.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, sorry." Reed walked towards the two men, also in grey jump suits. "I'm Reed Carraher . . . and IOK . . . but of course, you know that."

"Yes," said the older of the two, a paunchy, moody-looking, dark-haired man in his late forties. "I'm Webster Gianelli. This is Torbert Minden."

Carraher turned towards the other man, a slim, graceful, gray-haired man in his late thirties, who smiled and said, "How do you do? I am with IOT'moki and of course Webster is with IOR."

Reed shook their hands and then let Mina pull him away towards a bright white dispensary where she rubbed salve on his wounds and made him lie down on a soft-topped table under a Healer.

I have begun reconstruction of the damaged tissues. The girl will bring you food. When you have eaten you should sleep. Would you like a Dream?

"You sound as if you are going away."

In a sense. The Healer will require several hours and I must confer with IOT'moki about the Plan. The Fourth Level Conclave is engaging the Third Level Comitia in the k'stals. I have entered myself in the Term Callidity and must prepare that portion of my being. Within one time period it will be my duty of obligation and I must be certain I have purged all channels so that the energy flow is unimpaired.

"All at once?"

Of course these functions are concurrent. It would be grossly inefficient not to use every portion of your being in as many levels as you are capable of handling at peak levels of service.

"When IOZ was with me she didn't go on like that. She thought of fantastic images for me and delights that were a great deal of fun."

Must I remind you again that IOZ is Third Level and therefore neither capable of nor likely to be of service to her race, her morra nest or even her host.

"But she was fun."

Great Egg. I shall never rise to Fifth Level. You humans will corrupt me and I shall never rise higher. Your devious insanity will stain my thinking and I shall be cast out.

"A dedicated public servant like you? Never? Ah, here's Mina!"

The girl entered with a tray of food and drink, all in fanciful goblets and good plastic copies of Royal Martian china. "Here, my lord, the choice of the larder. Drink! Eat!"

Reed tore his eyes away from the smiling girl, wondering about his sudden strange feeling of warmth upon seeing her. Was it just that she was with IOZ? The two together seemed more fitting than even the closeness they had shared, and Reed was quite pleased. Two friends in one. And such a beautiful friend.

"Been here long?" he asked around a mouthful of analog-chicken.

"Point Four or Mars?"

"Marsh..." He washed it down with a crimson goblet of blue wine.

"On Mars a year, ever since I graduated from college. Just jumped on a ship and still had on my mortar board when I docked. I've been here at Point Four for a month. IOZ and I gulped an engineer around at Welles and had to hide out."

"Why all the way around the planet? Why not go to ground at Touchdown Station or out near Northaxe where that new station is?"

"I dunno, IOZ said here." There was a slight pause and then she continued. "I perceived that if your assignment with Compton required you to go to ground it would be here, and I wanted you two to meet."

Mina's smile faltered and she blushed. Carraher swallowed the wedge of blossom cheese and grinned into Mina's dark eyes. "Why, you sneaky match-maker you!"

I informed her it would be counter productive but she did it nevertheless.

'Are you back?'

IOT'moki is conferring with his nest. The Conclave and the Comitia are changing the rules to fit the Artala. My duty period has yet to begin and I am well on the way to purging my channels.

'So you're still hanging around?'

Until the designers of the Plan reassign me some portion of my being shall always be with you. Always. No matter where you are. Even if you were dead, I would remain in some energy pocket to be certain the body was disposed of to the satisfaction of the Planners.

'Ask a stupid question and you get more answer than you need.'

"You'd better relax," Mina said. "The Healer works better that way." She bent over Carraher as he lay back and her lips were close to his. "Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"No, do you?"

"No." She kissed him lightly on the corner of his mouth. "But I'm always having my beliefs shattered."

Reed smiled at her and this time there was no taste of blood. "There are times I resent being steered around like some kind of bio-car. But this isn't one of them."

"Do you feel like a pawn in the great chess game in the sky?"

"Yes. Mostly I kept wandering over to other squares but today . . . today I've been captured by a queen."

"Sleep . . . Get well. We have things to do," Mina said.

"Sleep, Reed Carraher, and heal," she said.

"Goodnight, Mina . . . 'Night, IOZ . . ." "Take me down, IOK."

Blackness came so fast Reed did not have time to ask for a Dream. But then, he didn't really need one.

A WAKEN

"Huh? Oh." "Oh, that's better. Everything's fixed, huh?"

Your tissues have been regenerated. I have made certain modifications in your facial structure and your voice identification pattern.

"Dammit, you should have consulted me!" "Hey, I do sound different! What did you do to my face?"

Carraher swung from the table and stepped towards a mirror. He stared at the new face dumbly.

He was different . . . but the same. No, more different than same.

There was only so much I could do with the time available. Given a much longer time I could alter your fingerprints and retinal patterns. I sense pleasure in you.

"You did consult me after all. I . . ." "I look like a composite of all the men I have admired." "I'm taller, I think."

Two centimeters.

"But why?"

A world wide telecast named you, by name, as the assassin of the scientist Compton. They broadcast a telefax of you and holos are being distributed.

Carraher sighed, then grinned at his image. "Not bad."

I shall never understand the mysteries of the human ego. What possible difference does a physical exterior make? The essential you remains untouched.

"You've been giving me Dreams, doesn't that give you a hint?"

I have merely been detailing fantasies that already exist in your mind. A First

Level adept could do as well. IOZ left codings in your mind for me to use, if I desired.

"Okay, all right! I don't understand you, either." "Now what? Where's Mina?"

While you slept the Conclave was assembled and it was decided that you human agents should attend.

"Why? Can't you just tell each of us what's happening?" "It's safe here. I'd like to just hide out awhile and let things blow over."

There is no time anymore. Events are progressing at a faster rate than anticipated. Our accelerated program of information acquisition has brought us important new information.

"You go." "I'll stay here with Mina and get acquainted."

Negative. The Conclave has determined that a Focus might be necessary. There is a need for a physical closeness between xerons and humans. Telepathic power is subject to the square root law just as any other power. With togetherness we can bring our powers to the highest peak.

"Oh, very well. But where do we go? I have no idea where the Nest is."

You will know when the time is appropriate.

"Secretive bastard." "Okay, when?"

As soon as possible. It will be necessary to abandon Point Four and destroy it when we leave. They will detect our leaving the planet and backtrack us to this site.

"Okay, let's go!" Carraher took one last glance at his own image and left the Healer room grinning.

In the main room he found everyone assembled and saw their expressions as

they absorbed his new appearance. Mina did not restrain her admiration.

"Ummm . . ." she said, saying a lot.

"Quite attractive," she said again and Reed sensed IOZ speaking.

"Did you really assassinate Compton?" Mina asked.

"Yes and no," Reed answered. "IOK was emptying Compton's mind. You know what that's like. But this was the fastest yet and . . . I was confused and distracted. The security guards surprised us and started shooting. I had to fire back or be killed. Compton got in the way and . . . I cut him down with a laser. I felt bad about that. We've always left them alive before."

"I don't like it either," Mina said.

"It is a necessary but regrettable action," said Webster Gianelli, who was with IOR. "A portion of the Plan will be revealed to you at the Conclave."

"Only a part?" Reed said.

Torbert Minden spoke, and Carraher realized it was IOT'moki speaking. "There are levels of the Plan. It is not necessary that lower levels know or understand the All."

Carraher grinned. "There are some things man was not meant to know, huh?" "Name one," he thought.

It would be advisable to exercise caution.

"Watch my mouth?"

Affirmative. There is no need to agitate friction. We all have work to do.

"Let us leave," Gianelli said.

They went through another airlock and down a long curving passage, then slightly upward to another airlock. Inside was the first xeron spaceship Carraher had seen, a forty-foot egg-like

vessel virtually featureless.

We adapted several ships for human use. Humans are larger and require a higher complexity of life support systems. For xeron use this would be a very large ship.

"Where are the acceleration couches?" Mina asked, looking around at casual-looking low padded benches.

They are not required.

The Martian desert split above them and the ship lifted off effortlessly. Torbert Minden lay on a couch with a glowing red ball suspended near his head. He appeared to be asleep.

Carraher exchanged looks with Mina and they shrugged and went to explore the ship. There were common sleeping quarters which caused Mina to blush slightly.

Another cabin held more casual couches and another floating globe, this one a deep blue, shot with half-glimpsed dots of light, like furry stars.

"Who built this ship?" Reed asked.

It is of Dubrian design and manufacture. The type is Crevlar-mulmato and the classification is Minor Vessel, Star Class.

"You mean we could . . . go to the stars in this thing?"

Affirmative. The Dubrians are one of the many races of this galaxy which use space travel. They are honored members of the Galactic Council and supply many races with vessels for exploration.

"You mean the xerons did not have space travel?"

Our explorations have been in other areas. The Dubrians are scientists. They discovered this system while mankind was still in the caves. They established a station for observation around Jupiter.

Your largest planet has many unique properties and they made a long study of it. But something happened and the entire party was lost on the surface of the planet. The station remained unoccupied until it was discovered by asteroid miners. The technology they acquired was instrumental in their revolution and independence from the central Terran government.

"So that's where all that great stuff came from!" "I thought they'd been developing their own technology."

That was their desired impression. But the accidental evacuation of the Dubrian station meant that man was not monitored until recent times and by then it was too late. Drastic action was and is necessary. With the acquisition of Dubrian technical knowledge mankind took a much bigger step forward than it was socially prepared to do.

"So what are we going to do?" Mina asked, shooting a glance at Reed as if to explain the same speech was in her head, too, relayed through IOZ.

Humans have proved much more difficult to handle than anticipated. We are not superbeings and man has become more intelligent faster than the primary surveys indicated.

"Man is a clever monkey," Reed said.

"And drastic action is needed," Mina said sadly.

The adaptation of the Dubrian star-drive is almost complete. Four ships have been constructed and provisioned in lunar orbit. In a matter of weeks the drive will be tested and explorers and colonists selected. We must act swiftly.

"But why not just let them go?" Mina asked.

Mankind is not mature. Not yet. We are not trying to stifle man but to help and guide him into the conclave of races. If he goes now into the stars he will be a disruptive force. If sufficient disruption is made the consensus will surely be to force mankind back to a pre-scientific age and to begin all over again. The next time he will be fully and carefully monitored.

"Controlled?" asked Reed.

Watched. But we hope for a better solution. To mature man first so that he might not need to suffer the rejection and pain of a realignment. Thus we have conceived the way for man to fit into the Plan for the galaxy.

"But if we're not capable of maturity . . . we get blasted back to the caves?" Carraher was both sad and angry.

How do you tell a child that he has not matured sufficiently to handle responsibility? So that he will believe it?

"I see what you mean," thought Reed, 'though I hate to think of Mankind as some kind of felon or beast.'

We are an ethical race. Our ultimate goal is to secure the cooperation of humans in preparing them for galactic acceptance. But if they achieve a star drive before they are sufficiently mature we would have no choice but to return you to the pre-scientific levels.

"Damn!" snapped Carraher. "I hate being told what to do like this!"

There is little choice.

"Listen," Reed said. "Why don't we go to Earth and broadcast the whole story. We could demonstrate some of the—say, could all the xerons together give all of mankind a Dream, all at once?"

It is possible. We would all need to go there at once. The dream would be adequate but not as vivid as yours. No. The risk is too much. All of us together would be too great a risk if the reaction was violently against us.

"Then our advances in technology have been far greater than our social and humane advances?" Mina asked.

Your technological advance was accidental. It must be corrected before unrestricted star flight would be permitted.

"Between the Devil and the Deep Blue sea . . ." muttered Reed.

"And the Conclave at the Nest is to determine policy?"

Affirmative. Why do you not use the blue sphere here to entertain yourselves? It has a different effect than supplying you with Dreams from your own mind. It can blend two minds by electronic telepathy and the effect is unusual.

"What do we do?" Reed asked.

Lie on the couches. Think out to each other. It will happen. You have two hours before arrival.

Mina looked at Reed and a faint flush colored her face. Her expression said *Want to?* Reed nodded and they lay down on the couches, feeling eager but self-conscious.

"What do we think about?" Reed asked aloud.

There was no answer but the floating globe began to flicker with interior light. It seemed to spin without spinning and Reed's attention was riveted on it.

An alien ball, floating in an alien ship . . . an alien in your mind . . . Electronic telepathy . . .

Mina . . . Mina . . . Mina . . . that

instant recognition that had experienced . . .

Lights spinning . . . spinning into the room, into their heads . . .

Mina . . .

Reed . . .

A warmth . . . a pleasure doubled . . . a pleasure shared . . .

Space around . . . stars . . . Mina . . . Reed . . . Mina/Reed . . . Reed/Mina . . .

A oneness . . .

Not a physical oneness . . . but a fitting together . . . *you are the other half of me* . . . the words that are not words . . . a blending, a sharing, a oneness . . .

Moving . . . spinning . . . bodies and minds and souls merged like gases . . . stars collide . . . a recognition of self in the other . . . there is "other" and there is "self" . . . doubled and doubled and doubled . . . without the *xerons* . . . by themselves . . . *they* were doing it . . . their minds kissed, their body-mind floated and fountained and was fiery and cold and flowing and one and two . . .

A spinning galaxy . . .

A spinning world . . .

A spinning globe . . .

Awakening . . .

Reed turned his head to look at Mina with his new face and with a new mind. She stared at him, wordless, her eyes searching his.

"You could never tell anyone and make them understand," Reed said.

"Never."

Now you have had a glimpse of the xeron existence.

"My god," Mina said softly.

We are almost at the Nest.

"Where are we?" Reed asked.

You should not know. What you do not know you cannot reveal, even inadvertently. The ship will be encased in the Nest's enclosure. If you attempt to look out your eyesight will be removed temporarily.

"I bet we're in the Jovian system. One of the moons or maybe some chunk of rock floating around. Of course, the Nest could be in the Asteroids. Ceres or Vesta or maybe Pallas. No, they have auto-stations. Eunomia, maybe. Hidalgo . . . Amor . . . hmm . . ."

"It doesn't matter, Reed," Mina said. "We shouldn't know."

"It's hard to calculate, this ship moves so differently . . . we could be at Pluto, for Christ's sake."

"Reed," Mina pleaded, "forget it." Mina put her arms around Reed and got his attention. "Let's do something we've never done before, okay?"

Carraher's face broke into a wide grin. He put a hand on top of her dark head and tilted up her face. They looked at each other for a long moment and the smiles faded and they knew that an important thing had come to pass between them. Reed bent his head and they kissed, long and hard and well.

"That other kiss . . ." Mina said, "that was IOZ. This was me. The first time."

We have arrived. We must disembark.

Reed and Mina walked back through the ship to the airlock arm in arm and a foolish grin tugged at the corners of Reed's mouth. When he saw the portly Gianelli and the lean, gray Minden he could not help himself and broke into a delighted laugh.

"We've just had the most extraordinary experience—!"

"Yes, yes," Gianelli said with irritation, "Let us get into the Nest."

Reed grinned at him, feeling smug and benevolent. He helped Mina out of the hatch and through a short translucent duct into another airlock.

They emerged into a corridor, cut in rock and melted smooth. The passage led to a central chamber, where there were low couches.

"Where are the *xerons*?" Carraher asked.

It is not necessary that we become physically confronted. The nearness of us all is sufficient.

"You guys must be really ooogy," Reed laughed. "Think we can't take it?"

Over a hundred people were in the room, patiently waiting. Some were Dreaming. There were no introductions and they arranged themselves at various spots casually. Torbert Minden showed one of the men how to use the liquid dispenser and drinks were handed around. The Dreamers awoke.

"Well?" Reed asked IOK.

The Third Level Comitia has disengaged from the Conclave and is involved in a portion of the Plan.

"Are we the only humans here?" asked one of the men.

"Yes," Minden answered. "There was no time to get others."

"All normal *xeron* activity has been cancelled," a woman said.

"We are on alert status everywhere," one of the men said.

We begin.

Everyone turned or moved, although there was no focal point. Most just

stared at the wall.

Xeron actions have come to the attention of the Terran governments. They had presumed it was the work of the United Jovian System until the human called Langley was given command of the force opposing us.

Carraher could not identify the thoughts of the xeron speaking to them and presumed it was that of the Fifth Level adept who commanded the xeron force.

Langley is the human genius who achieved the breakthrough in understanding and adapting the Dubrian star-drive to Terran technology.

'But the stardrive's not finished—!'

There are only the final modifications and testing left. Langley saw patterns in our investigations and was intrigued. We fascinate him and unfortunately he is in possession of a few facts that we thought unimportant. He formulated theories and found means to check them and has discovered too much.

Carraher felt a sudden elation. The xerons could be fooled! They could be out-thought! It took a genius but it had been done!

Those of his aides and those in the government who know about us, or about the mystery they attribute to us, are angry and resent our guidance as intrusion. They will be extremely difficult to persuade that the Plan is of the utmost importance.

"How has this affected the Plan?" one of the men asked.

The Plan needs modification and quick execution. The governments of Earth are very disturbed about the sabotaging of their star drive. They believed it was a parochial reaction of the Jovian

government, but now that they believe it is the result of extraterrestrial power they resent the intrusion even more and think it is an attempt to keep mankind from the stars.

"Is it?" Reed asked and several people looked at him, including Mina.

No. Only to delay. To contain mankind in this system until he is mature enough to accept his galactic responsibilities is our only desire.

"Perhaps you are wrong. Perhaps even the best intentions are wrong." Carraher felt trapped in the role of Devil's Advocate, but his conscience compelled him to ask.

We are not gods, Reed Carraher.

"Less than gods and more than men?" Carraher asked.

Different. Not better. Not worse. Different. Different powers, different goals, different races. But the Plan was not conceived just for this tiny system. It is the Plan for the galaxy, conceived by a conclave of races over twenty million of your years ago, and adhered to ever since. Yours would not be the first race returned to a savage level, nor will it be the last. There have been other races obliterated, races so savage and so immune to sane persuasion that they were imprisoned, eliminated, or radically amended.

"Will that happen here?"

We do not know. We sincerely hope not. Mankind has a vigor and a vitality far above the average. Your quick growth in the sciences attests to that.

"But we're just savages with lasers, cavemen with spaceships?"

To some of the races of the galactic conclave you are just that.

"Suddenly I feel like a traitor to my

own race," Reed said and two of the men nodded.

"Don't feel that way, Reed," Mina said, touching his sleeve. "The Plan is a sensible one. The use the *xerons* makes of us is logical. They need a mobile focusing point, a sensory pickup."

"And someone to stick the drug into another human to eat his mind in a gulp." Reed found himself glaring around at the circle of humans.

"But the person is not destroyed. The information is replaced as fast as it is taken and recorded. You know that." Mina looked up at him with concern.

"And Compton is dead," Reed said bitterly.

The death of the human is regrettable but your guilts are not the concern of this Conclave. Plan modifications must be made and executed. Our use of humans was only logical. We needed to find out the specifics of the Dubrian adaptations. We have decided upon the area of action so that the quickest and best result will come from the least effort.

"What are we to do?" asked Gianelli.

Our agents on Earth and Luna have concentrated upon locating Langley. He is the key. If we can convince him of our intentions much time and a great amount of energy will be saved. As soon as he is located we will focus upon him and the power of the assembled Conclave will overcome his defenses. He will be ours.

"That's not convincing him," Carraher said angrily. "That's rape!"

We have no time for subtle methods.

"Those aren't 'Bad Guys' down there on Earth! They believe sincerely in

what they're doing!" Mina put a cautionary hand on Reed's sleeve.

Kagor of Thembis believed in what he thought was right and destroyed two billion beings. Both sides of the Torrus were 'right' but they destroyed three planets. Blar-kla-mon killed only three hundred beings but he destroyed the future of his race forever. Molanu was 'right' and Jillik I' Borad was 'right' but now two entire star systems are dust. Shall we go on?

"Okay, forget it." Carraher sighed. How can you argue with someone for whom the galaxy and umpteen billions years of history is part of his heritage?

It is known that Langley has attempted in various ways to discover our whereabouts, even though he has no idea who or what we might be. He is unusually intelligent.

"Is he star level?" Mina asked.

Carraher looked curiously at her. 'Evidently,' he thought, 'there are things that she and IOZ discuss that I don't know.'

There was a long pause, almost as if the *xerons* were either reluctant to answer or still pondering the question. Then the voice in their heads said, *Perhaps.*

"Well, what do we do?" one of the men asked. "Just sit here until he finds us?"

All of those not here are attempting to locate Langley. Until then there is nothing to do. He could be anywhere. Apparently he keeps his person secretive. There is even evidence that he might be telepathic, for it was only he who found the proper analogues between the Dubrian technology and his own. The Dubrian ships are controlled by telepathic

computers and an intelligent telepath might find out more quickly the secrets of an alien system.

"How long do we wait?" another man asked.

We do now know. Rest. When he is found there will be much to do.

Reed turned to Mina and said, "Let's look around."

"Looking for another blue globe?" she asked, a smile spreading across her serious expression. Carraher grinned and took her hand and led her through the milling humans and down a passage.

The Nest seemed to be cut from solid rock, the passages cut and sheared and melted smooth into wide, low corridors and the rooms small but compact. There were many communal sleeping quarters but no single rooms.

"Only a race without sexes would think *that* was a good idea," Reed said, looking at their second communal sleeping room.

"They seemed to have constructed this place for humans, though," Mina said, looking into another room, apparently a recreational section.

"What I'm looking for," Reed said, prowling along the corridor with Mina in tow, "is a blue globe . . ."

"Ah!" Mina said cheerfully.

Seven rooms later they found a series of small rooms, each with a floating blue sphere and around it, low and wide, were seven radiating couches, like flower petals.

Reed looked at the couch arrangement and said, "That must be something. Seven minds merging."

"Incredible," Mina whispered. She tugged at Reed's hand and they lay

down on couches.

"I'm beginning to think this is better than sex," Reed sighed, wiggling back into comfort.

"You're hooked," Mina said with mock distaste.

"Yup . . . on you. And if this isn't the fastest, best way to get to know the inside of your head I'd sure like to know about it."

"How do we start it, anyway," she asked. "Just think it on?"

"Let's try." *On. Start. Begin.*

The tiny flicks of lightning flashed through the blue globe. The spinning started and the two humans stared in fascination at the alien sphere over their heads.

. . . faster . . .

. . . faster . . . a whirling through void, through a nebulous gas . . . then stars were flung into space, flaring balls of fire . . . suns were born . . .

. . . there were stars in their heads . . . spinning galaxies of stars, moving away, pinwheels of starfire arcing off into void . . .

. . . Reed?

. . . Mina!

. . . *It's fantastic! I'm—I'm frightened—but it's incredible—!*

. . . *It's all of space! It's bigger this time! The Universe!*

. . . Giant gas clouds were shining in the blackness, lit by the burning hearts of a million suns, and they were drifting past, light-years long, with stars bursting and dying within, new stars forming, gleaming . . .

. . . Nebulae . . . star clusters . . . gleaming, shining walls of stars . . . galaxies on edge, spinning past, a mosaic of fiery electrons . . .

... a glimpse of something beyond ...

... *what's that?*

... *another universe?*

... *beyond that!*

... *the beginning? The end? God?*

... the two of them were swollen beyond galaxies, their minds expanding faster than light ... galaxies were growing smaller ...

... *Reed ... Reed, it's too much to hold! It's so beautiful! So vast!*

... *I love it!*

... *Reed ... flow into me ... make me part of you ...*

... colliding universes ...

... a flowering ...

... spinning ... joining ... flowing ... being ...

... stars were born, grew old and red, and died ...

... galaxies turned, flinging long starry arms out into the void ...

... time stretched and stretched ... meaningless time ...

... *Reed! I love you, Reed!*

... Bursting ... BURSTING ... **BURSTING!**

... *I love you ...*

... *you are me ... I am you ... we are one ...*

... it was the beginning of time ... galaxies of bright burning stars exploded out through the dusty nebulae, catapulted into blackness, populating it with light ...

... *Reed!*

... *Mina!*

... two parts of oneness, crying across the infinite void to capture itself ...

... to become ...

... to be ... Reed and Mina ...

... a spinning world ...

... a whirling globe ...

... dying starpoints within the blue sphere ...

... to lie, gutted and spent and weak, shorn of ego and identity and memory ...

... to swim back ...

... to return ...

... to be Reed ...

... to be Mina ...

... to be separate, yet forever one ...

... to be Reed and Mina lying on couches in an alien Nest ...

A LONG SILENCE. A soft silence, broken only by breathing. A long sigh. "Ohh, Reed ..." Mina's hand fluttered weakly.

"If ... if this is an example of how it is in the stars ... then I'm for doing anything I can to help ... it's ... fantastic."

"But it's you and I, Reed. We did it, the sphere only focused us."

"Then Man better get out into the stars! But not if going to soon and too unprepared will screw it up. We can't lose the chance! It's too important."

"Reed ..." Mina put out her hand and Carraher took it.

"Honey, if that's what we can do on our second trip out I'm not so sure we'll come back next time. That's potent stuff."

"I won't worry if you are along ... and I'm not going unless you are," Mina said, slipping from the couch to lie next to Reed, who embraced her.

"Don't worry, baby, I—"

We are under attack! The Nest is in danger!

Reed Carraher jumped to his feet and pulled Mina with him. "Where? What's happening? What do we do?"

Six ships of the United Earth fleet are approaching from Callisto.

"Then we are in the Jovian system!" Reed cried.

They fired four atomic missiles but we activated the defenses of the four ships and the Nest. Two more ships have joined the fleet from Callisto. They are coming around Jupiter now.

"How do they know where we are?" Reed demanded as they raced along the corridor. Other humans were running for the airlocks and the ships.

No time for that. The Conclave states that the oncoming ships will be too much for the defenses to handle. We must outrun them.

Suddenly the running humans all stopped and changed direction. Reed and Mina felt compelled to follow. They ran down another corridor and straight at a blank smooth rock wall.

The rock split and swung back and the humans raced through without stopping. Inside was a large room carved from rock. The air was thin and strangely scented and the light was dim and red. Around the walls were bins filled with strange rotting fruit the size of watermelons. Reed leaped for one particular bin and even as his body reacted, swiftly but gently scooping up the great tan and black fruit he realized what they were.

The Xerons!

Reed spun and started running for the entrance, seeing that each of the humans scooped up one of the xerons and was racing back. They were heavy,

a full armload to carry gently, and had a fragile feel to them.

Reed saw Mina cuddling a tan and black melon to her breast as she dodged past older and slower humans to race out with her precious cargo. They sprinted down the corridor and back towards the airlocks.

"How did they know?" Reed thought furiously.

They transmitted to a passive signalling device concealed in the corns of three of the humans. The tuned circuit returned a signal they could trace.

"Who were the traitors?" Reed snarled.

Mina was one.

Ahead, Reed saw Mina falter and throw him a frightened, bewildered look over her shoulder. She struck the wall with her shoulder, staggered and ran.

"How?" "Why?"

Unknown. Unknown. We are penetrating deeply into the minds of—answer found. Langley. He is of star level after all. He put together several counterforces on several levels and in different areas—faster than we conceived a human could correlate the sparse facts he had.

Reed jumped through the hatch into the Dubrian ship along with several others. They deposited the xerons on couches and started back for the rest.

Stop. There is no time. The rest know their fate.

"But we can still save some!" a man shouted.

No time. Activate ship.

The hatches closed and there was a faint whirring.

We are in space. The Terran fleet is still out of laser range and the atomic

missiles are being deflected by Nest's defenses. When the ships are closer they will be able to reinforce the energy and overcome the deflectors.

"Where are we going?" Reed asked.

Earth. We will outrun the fleet and appear to be heading out of the plane of the ecliptic. With stardrive we will go far out and around and approach Earth from the other side.

"Why Earth? Oh . . . Langley's there?"

Affirmative. He is our only hope. If he is truly of star level he will understand. He must understand.

Suddenly Reed remembered what the xeron had said earlier. "But you said Mina was one of the traitors! I can't believe that!" Mina looked white.

She was the unwitting pawn of Langley. One of the counterforces he erected was a group of agents who had been implanted with passive devices in corns and old scars and other insensitive areas. Xerons find it distasteful to enter any more of the host's body than is absolutely necessary, thus the devices concealed in areas serviced with little or no blood escaped undetected.

"But you must have detected something!" Reed was aghast.

Mina Wallace was known to be on Mars and when our ship left and Point Four detonated behind us they activated the frequency her device was on. It was a tuned circuit and retransmitted the signal. Apparently the first signal accidentally came during your first use of the mind focuser.

"And the computers gave them the orbit to the Nest," Reed said wearily.

Mina cleared her throat and said, "Reed, I didn't know."

"I know, baby."

"Those poor xerons."

Do not feel guilt. There were two others. You were unknowing. We compute that bringing so many humans to one spot to allow for a strong focusing caused a focal point in the tracing of their agents.

"But why me?" Mina asked.

Langley perceived a pattern. We were investigating in one main area, that of how advanced man's adaptation of the Dubrian stardrive might be. Langley seeded the most likely areas with implanted agents. Our selection of those we work through is partially dictated by their ability to move in the area we are investigating. Mina Wallace was unknowingly recruited just before graduation.

"My degree is in physics, and my specialty is cybernetics. I was hoping to get a berth on the starships when they went," Mina said. "I really wanted that. I thought I had a damn good chance to get it, too, because I was doing some good work for the Lockheed Spaceframe Division, which built the starships. Damn!"

Reed took her in his arms, and patted her back. "Don't feel too bad. If this guy Langley can outsmart the xerons then he can outfox you and me, honey."

"I feel like such a bloody fool!" she grumbled into his chest. "It's my fault all those other xerons are dead. Or going to be dead."

Dead. One megaton missile broke through the overloaded deflectors two and one half minutes ago.

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Sorry . . ."

"Did the other ships escape?" Reed asked.

Two did. Two did not. There were too many attackers. One ship headed into the attackers to draw fire. The other was too close to the missile when it destroyed the Nest.

"Oh, god . . ." Mina said softly.

"Why did they just attack like that?"

Reed asked angrily. "Why didn't they talk to us first?"

Fear. They were afraid of our powers for we were an unknown quantity to them. We were alien invaders that suck minds dry and control humans with mental force.

"Well, they're right," Reed thought, "but not the way they think."

Rest. I will awaken you.

Humans were bedding down on the deck everywhere and Reed and Mina picked a way through them towards a free space. They glanced into the room where all the *xerons* had been placed.

Tan and black melons from the stars. 'I feel as if I should be repelled, but I'm not,' thought Reed. 'They're . . . different, that's all. Well meaning friends or well meaning enemies—who knows? The scope upon which they think and plan and act is too big for me to understand. Plans twenty billion years long. Galaxy wide. Umpteen races. Faster-than-light ships. Stars like diamond dust.'

Reed settled down against a smooth wall and cuddled Mina to him, feeling her warmth and friendly presence.

'Mina . . . dear Mina . . . the other part of me . . .

'The whole thing is incredible. Me, a mind-sucking secret agent helping to decide the fate of Man. I get into it

because that smooth-talking dude at Ares Center got into my head. I get a "trial run" and like it. The Dreams are worth it all. Or so I thought. But now . . . now I'm not so sure. Mina is worth it. So I'm in. To the end. And maybe out the other side, greedy guts. Reach for a Dream bigger and better and wilder than any psychedelic and find something greater than you suspected possible.'

. . . the stars . . .

. . . life in the great black void of space . . .

. . . sleep . . .

REED CARRAHER STOOD in the bubble of the ship's control room and looked out at space and the growing blue-green ball of Earth.

'I never get tired of seeing it,' he thought, 'ever since that first look when I was a kid, looking out of the port of that old Galileo class tub when my father took me to the moon. Blue with swirls and feathers of white; green and tan laced over with clouds.'

'The home world.'

'Man's world. No matter how many planets, how many moons or orbiting rocks he makes a home on, Terra will always be *home*. Even if we go to the stars, it will always be *home world*, the poor gutted, over-populated son of a bitch.'

We must land and get to Langley as swiftly as possible. There will be no second chance. The last ship sacrificed itself so that we might escape.

Carraher shivered. It was becoming altogether too serious. He'd signed up with the *xerons* because it was a challenge, a lark, a real adventure with the

promise of a treasure at the end. A life of riches and ease, for after all, what good was money to a xeron, *except* as a tool in dealing with a human?

"Where do we land?" Where's Langley?

Sahara Base. We will dive straight down and land atop the building where he is most likely to be. The ship will immobilize everyone within several hundred yards. But we only have so long before they counterattack and the ship's sensors will be overloaded.

Commandos, thought Carraher, just like ancient commandos. Or suicide troops.

He watched the Earth grow and they were angling straight down out of space towards the tanned top of the African continent with its miles and miles of concrete pads and maintenance buildings and passenger terminals and atmospheric transport facilities.

Carraher began to see ships rising up from the pads and they passed one fairly closely, a sleek new Gorgon class streaming fire. They overtook and passed a bulky ore transporter coming in on auto from the moon mines.

The horizon changed from a ball to a curve to nothing but the brown stretch of Sahara Base and still they shot down at fantastic speed.

"I hope you guys know what you are doing," muttered Reed.

We will brake at the appropriate time. It is one of the advantages of antigravity units. You should go to the airlock now and prepare to disembark.

Reed found Mina buckling on a laser and he picked up a heavy duty Colt Magnum and strapped the laser on.

"I hope we don't have to use these,"

he said. Mina nodded, checking the charge indicator.

The humans crowded into the passage, filling the airlock. They overrode the automatics and set up both hatches to open at once so that all the humans could stream out onto the roof as quickly as possible.

We are landing on the building assigned to the counterforce.

Reed loosened the laser in its holster and shot a glance at Mina. She looked up at him and a faint smile came and went before she sobered and looked back at the gray metal lock door.

Now.

A slight tremor and then the outer hatch swung wide. The humans jumped out and started for the several entrances down into the building from the helipad. Reed noticed scattered figures frozen in attitudes of flight or startlement.

The ship is holding them to free us for the final battle.

Carraher felt himself directed towards the furthest entrance and he ran across the rooftop with Mina close behind. Down the stairs . . . top floor . . . more stairs . . . next floor . . . frozen humans staring from their immobilized bodies . . .

Here. Turn here. That corridor. That door.

Carraher and Mina were joined by several humans converging on the same spot. Reed was just behind two others as they rushed through an outer office, then an inner lab of some sort, then into another office and stopped before a final door.

Six of them pushed through it and crowded into the room, lasers ready,

and Carraher noticed that Torbert Minden was one of them. A man sat frozen at a desk, quietly sitting as if listening.

A trick. A holograph.

Panels snapped open and big brute lasers were aiming at them, manned by automatics, controlled from where—? Carraher spun and there were more lasers, big monster ten millimeter GEs that could cut a ship in two.

He was taking no chances, Reed thought. But they weren't firing . . .

"Hello, there," a voice said conversationally and the trapped humans looked at the figure of the man in the chair. He gestured with his hand. "You all look very human. Are you, or do aliens control you?"

No one answered and the holographic projection continued blandly. "I am some distance from you, shielded and protected. Everything there is controlled by my aides or myself from outside your sphere of control. I can see now that I overestimated your area of immobilization, but no matter.

"I am Steven Langley. Ah . . . and you are . . . Torbert Minden and Artur Gregorio . . . and the beautiful Mina . . . and our famous blundering assassin, Reed Carraher . . . oh, yes, I know many of you."

A man turned towards the door despite the lasers but froze even before Langley spoke. The man turned back slowly and assumed a placid expression.

"Ah . . ." Langley sighed softly, "So you are controlled. Whoever or whatever rides your brains knows that my autolasers have stopped everyone on

the roof." He laughed softly. "Quite an impasse, no? Here we are, meeting creatures from the stars for the first time and I do not have some sand to draw a solar system in."

Mina spoke, her voice sudden and startling in the silence. "We are not the monsters you think we are. Yes, what you see are human beings, but we are *with* members of a race from a system of planets near what we call the Horsehead Nebula. They are the *xerons* and are a peaceful and philosophical race."

"That seeks to control the Earth or at least bottle up man and keep him from the stars," sneered Langley.

"That's not true," Mina answered. "The *xerons* want only to help us mature enough to be accepted by the various races and cultures."

Langley looked at her a moment, then scanned the others. "A very convincing speech, my dear, especially coming from the mouth of a double traitor!"

"I am not a traitor! You made me a spy and I didn't even know it! And I am not a traitor to the human race! I'm trying to help it, just as I would help a child that's about to run off a cliff!"

"You are all renegades!" Langley's eyes flared. "You have conspired to keep man from the stars!"

"The star drive was Dubrian. You merely adapted it," Reed said.

Langley's gaze swung to him. "A murderer speaks . . ."

"You will be the greatest murderer of all earth's history if you let man go out *now*," Mina said. "Man will be smashed back to savagery and on the

way back up he will be monitored all the way. A much different sort of Man will emerge."

Langley looked at them again, his dark eyes moving from face to face. He must be looking at a bank of screens, Reed thought. Where is he hiding?

Five hundred ten meters to the South Southwest. Concrete bunker underground.

Why didn't you know that before?

We did.

"What?" "Why did you let us be trapped like this?"

To talk. Attacking the bunker would have been suicide.

Langley spoke, slowly and with deadly earnestness. "I want to go to the stars *now*. I don't want to wait until Man is 'mature.' That may never happen and certainly not in my lifetime. All my life I have been surrounded by fools and morons; I expect *always* to be wading through idiots. I'll not let their stupidity keep me from the stars. I *can* go to the stars *now*; I *will* go now!"

"And you will bring disaster upon Mankind," Torbert Minden said.

"I will bring glory!"

We must use the power of our minds in conclave. Support me.

It was a whole new "voice" in his head and Carraher recognized it as IOZ . . . but a new IOZ. Stronger, bigger, more . . . powerful, as if she had been holding back, hiding . . . as if it had been masquerading.

Reed stared at Mina, who was looking with a startled expression at the image of Langley.

Reach out—quickly!

Carraher felt the funneling effect as the power of IOKS's mind swept through him. The lights in the room dimmed and brightened, dimmed and went out as energy of every sort flowed towards Langley.

There were swirling lights in his mind and soundless winds . . . all following IOZ . . . the new IOZ . . . there was a mindless moaning . . .

She is Sixth Level.

There was amazement in IOK's thoughts, though the thought/image/words/emotions were still calm.

She was hiding even from us. The Plan has many levels . . .

The room of humans stood motionless in the darkness as the storm raged through their minds. There seemed to be no walls, no citadels, only void and space and blackness and the silent storm.

None of them had even been part of an attacking Conclave before and briefly Reed wondered if they would all return sane. Or alive.

IOZ.

"IOZ!"

IOZ!

The funneling into blackness, into void, into Langley . . . the focusing . . . racing along wires . . . crackling through circuits . . . searching . . . a million mice racing for a black moon . . . blanking, blocking . . . shielding . . .

A tightbeam of mental force smashed into the bunker, into the human called Langley . . . a granite boulder washed by a raging sea . . .

The boulder moved and shuddered, then struck back, a weak and unfocused blow, but they sensed the power

behind the untrained weapon. The sea struck again and again, crashing endlessly down on the granite surface . . .

Cracks appeared and closed, appeared again . . .

Opening . . . closing . . . lightning jagged cracks ripped open and slowly closed . . . thoughts leaking out, spurted out like blood under pressure . . . colors . . . redness . . . fear . . . question . . . space with stars streaking and running like water . . . comets flashing close . . . fire . . .

The boulder cracked and cracked and cracked under the storm pressure . . . then the bursting . . . and the sea washed over it . . . a fierce tight whorl of force drew to it all the power, all the photons and psychic energy . . . blackness . . . and in the blackness a voice . . .

YOU ARE IN OUR POWER.

'Yes.

'Beaten but not owned . . .'

Langley's thoughts came through to Carraher like weak shouts in the wind, but they were defiant thoughts and Carraher admired him.

'Go to hell . . . kill me . . . but Man will go to the stars . . .'

You are powerless.

'Yes . . . for now . . .'

Suddenly there was a lifting, at Langley's admission of helplessness . . . light returned . . . the pressure was gone . . .

Reed felt helpless, completely open and defenseless. He could not move.

He sensed an outpouring of information into Langley's mind, flowing through him, through them all, into one human mind . . . stars and maturity . . . life and death . . . savages in the

outworlds . . . vandals in the clean palaces of the starworlds . . . corruption . . . disease . . . responsibility . . . maturity . . . decision . . .

Then a pulling back, a releasing, and Langley was free. Only a line of thought tied him to them all.

We are open to you. You know the situation. It is your decision. You decide for mankind. What you decide mankind will follow. We are helpless. We make no pressure upon you, overt or covert. Now . . . you decide.

Langley's voice came to them. "But I want the stars!" His voice was weak, both in power and determination. It was almost a cry for help.

There was a long pause and Reed heard only the winds of time, then IOZ spoke again.

It is possible that mankind might mature faster than expected. This race has done everything else faster than anticipated.

"Yes . . ." Langley's voice bore the weight of a heavy responsibility. "Yes . . . I cannot bring the death of my culture . . . you are right. I will help. But I'm not going to like it one bit! I want—god-dammit—to go to the stars!"

IOZ spoke kindly.

You are the first of the New humans. The first human of star level. That is a greater thing than being a freebooter among the outworlds.

"I didn't want to take. I wanted to learn." Langley's voice was sad but hopeful. "Maybe we have something to teach, too."

You do. Many things. We will all learn.

LANGLEY STOOD IN the Dubrian ship next to a low couch. "Lie down," Carraher said. The slender, dark-haired man lay on the couch and watched Reed and Mina lie down on other of the "petals."

"What do we do now?" Langley asked.

"Let it happen," Mina said.

"Will IOZ be going with us?" the scientist asked.

Yes. In all three of your minds.

(Continued from page 25)

Reservation. I want to know what is the matter with me."

"Zimmerman told me himself it was only psychological."

"Zimmerman!" said Asta bitterly. "And 'only' psychological! I know I'm not a mental defective, so what is it? Did I show signs of schizophrenia, or paranoia, or what? What kind of abnormality might I pass on to your child? Don't you see that you've got to find out for me?"

"I will, Asta, I will. I'll look up the records tomorrow."

He couldn't wait, the next day, to tell her in the evening, at home; he went to the Discard Adjustment Office on the run, waving a file. The sudden relief in her face as she saw his glee twisted his heart; why hadn't he realized before that the uncertainty would prey on her?

"What was it, Lucas?" she asked quickly.

He laughed aloud as he hugged her. He wouldn't have cared if they *hadn't* been alone in the office.

"Set your mind at rest forever, Asta!" he cried. "Here it is in black and white,

"To the stars," breathed Langley softly.

"In a way," Reed said. "You'll see things but you won't be there. But you'll be there in a way you could never be. Then you can truly tell mankind about it all."

"Let's go," Langley said. The sphere began to whirl.

And they went to the stars. Mankind was never to be the same again.

—WILLIAM ROTSLER

in Zimmerman's own handwriting.

"The subject Asta has been transferred at my direction to the Discard Reservation. We are trying to breed aggression and obstructiveness out of our coming super-race, not into it. Despite unusual intelligence and physical superiority, this subject has displayed a degree of violent hostility which places her, not among our successes, but among our discarded failures."

Mingled outrage and amusement swept across Asta's face.

"Why, the old goat!" she cried. "I was only fifteen, but I was well developed for my age. He made a pass and I resisted."

"What did you do—hit him?"

Asta giggled.

"He was much stronger and bigger than I was—I couldn't hurt him with my fists. Why do you suppose he wore that big mustache, the way men did ages ago—probably wears it still, wherever they've got him under restraint?"

"It's to hide the scar where I bit a piece out of his upper lip!"

—MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

ALEXEI and CORY PANSHIN

This story marks one of the first appearances of a new Panshin by-line—the collaborative team of Alexei and his wife Cory. It was also written around the Todd/Bodé painting on our cover this issue. You might for a moment pause to look at that painting again before reading about Triphammer, Puddleduck, Mount Rushmore, the Landlord Thing and—

SKY BLUE

(Cover Story)

Illustrated by DAVID COOK

SKY BLUE WAITS for Landlord Thing. He holds the most powerful gun Groombridge Colony can hand him. He sits on a small unnaturally comfortable rock in space.

Overhead the heavens wheel. Beneath him the brown planet whirls. Like a midge on a grain of wheat, he passes between millstones.

A FAT SPACESHIP blipping on business like a slickery black watermelon seed went astray one day between Someplace Important and Someplace Important, and wound up lost on the great black floor of the galaxy. It was the pilot's fault, if you want to blame someone. He was stargazing at the wrong moment, misapplied his math, and then fritzed the drive in a fruitless attempt to recoup.

The ship came to drift without power in a place where the stars glittered nervously and all the skies were strange. It was weird there, and after one look the curtains were hastily

drawn. Nobody wanted to look outside except one boy named Harold who held the curtains in his hands and peeked.

The pilot killed himself in another fit of overcompensation, but nobody noticed. They were all dead men in their dark powerless ship in that strange icicle corner of the universe, but nobody would say so. They huddled together in various parts of the ship and talked of usual matters.

Now, this wasn't just any old ship. This was a big deal colony whip on its way to settle Groombridge 1618/2, a planet foredoomed for importance. It was so juicy a place that you had to pay high for a slice of the pie.

The passengers on this ship had all paid. They were men of moxie. They knew the answers. Here's a topper: Triphammer and Puddleduck, who had more answers than anybody, were aboard, too. They were along for the dedication ceremonies and a quick return home. They moved in high circles.

Being lost so suddenly was as painful and frustrating to Triphammer and Puddleduck as an interrupted fuck. Suddenly their answers were of no use to them. Oh, it hurt.

Triphammer, Puddleduck and Mount Rushmore were the highest huddle of all. They gathered by a candle in one room. Triphammer paced frantically, Puddleduck nodded at appropriate moments, and Mount Rushmore loomed. Harold looked out through the curtains into the universe.

Triphammer said, "Oh, losings. Screemie! The action, pop-a-dop." Her face could not contain her regret.

Puddleduck nodded. "Misery," he said.

"Misery," said Mount Rushmore.

Harold said, "There's somebody walking by outside."

He was the son of Triphammer and Puddleduck. They hadn't given him a proper name yet, and he wasn't sure they meant to keep him. He needed them, so until he discovered their intention he was playing it quiet.

"Out of mind," said Puddleduck, beating his brow. "Replebed and forgot."

Triphammer held a sudden hand before her mouth. "Oh, speak not."

"Misery," said Mount Rushmore.

Harold waved. "Hey, he sees me." He waved again.

Triphammer and Puddleduck didn't hear what Harold said. It was his fault. He didn't speak up. They had told him that it was his fault if he wasn't heard.

Great Mount Rushmore pounded himself on the chest. "Gelt gone blubbles. Misery. Misery."



Puddleduck said, "Misery."

"Miz," said Triphammer.

There was a tug at her sleeve and she looked down. It was Harold waiting for her attention.

"Again?"

Harold put on his best face and straightened to the full extent of his undergreat height, which was what he had been taught to do when he asked for things.

"Can I go out and play, Mama? Please?" he asked, waving at the window.

Triphammer's expression made it clear that any request at this moment was a fart in church, and that the gods were displeased with the odor.

"What what? Bird twitter while empires fall? Shame and a half, Harold, you nameless twirp. (Forbearing, but not much.) Forbidding."

"I'm really extremely sorry I asked," Harold said.

There was sudden consternation in the room. Out of nowhere—certainly not through the door—had come a being altogether strange. And here it was, making five now around the candle. It had pseudopods and big brown eyes.

"Wowzers, a creature!" said Mount Rushmore. He backed away. "Bling it."

The creature looked at Harold and said, "Are you coming or not?"

Triphammer had a tender stomach. She tried without success to stifle a retch.

"Faa," she said. "Bling it."

Harold said, "I'm not allowed. I asked already."

Puddleduck looked around and around the room, nodding furiously

and muttering constant instructions to himself lest he forget, but there was nothing ready at hand to bling the creature with. Puddleduck waved his arms like frustrated semaphores.

"But of course you are allowed," the creature said. "If you want to come with me, you may. I don't forbid anyone."

It broke off abruptly and looked around at Mount Rushmore, Triphammer and Puddleduck as they recoiled.

"Is something the matter?" it asked, flexing its polyps in wonderment.

Triphammer looked at it with a glance like a pointing finger, and vomited reproachfully.

"I beg your pardon," the creature said.

It gathered itself together, contracting its pseudopods into the main mess of its body. Its brown eyes bulged hugely and then blinked. And, speedy quick as a hungry duck, its appearance was altered. Where there had formerly been an—ugh—amorphous monster, now there stood a dark sweet old man with a short brushy mustache and a nose like a spearhead, as definite as geometry. He was dressed in a khaki shirt and shorts to the knee and sturdy walking shoes.

"Is that better?"

"Oh, scruples!" said Triphammer.

And it was better. Triphammer and Puddleduck knew how to deal with people. Creatures were another matter. They brightened to see him, for the old man looked like a mark and they desperately needed someone to take advantage of.

The sweet old fud looked around that dim room there in the dead and silent spaceship as though it were a very strange place.

"Pardon me if I'm being overcritical of your favored pastimes, but is this really what you like to do? It seems limited. You could be outside on a day like this," he said.

Mount Rushmore shook his head like a rag mop. "Not happy, not happy," he said. "Oh, not. Gelt gone bubbles, you know."

"Lost and out of it," Triphammer explained. "Unjuiced, weenied and paddleless."

"Screamie-a-deamie!" said Puddleduck. "Massive frust! In the name of our importance, unpickle us."

"I had the feeling things weren't just right," the old man said. "Don't ask me how I knew. I have an instinct for these things. Well, I'll help you as much as I can. Come along with me."

He turned and walked abruptly through the wall of the ship. Gone. And no one followed him.

He stuck his head back into the room, looking like a well-seasoned wall trophy.

"Well, come along," he said reasonably.

Harold, smiling brightly, took a happy step forward. Then he noticed that Triphammer and Puddleduck were standing stock still. Above all else, he desired to please them and be kept. He couldn't help himself. He stopped and wiped his smile away, and then he didn't move, he didn't breathe. He did check to see what his parents did, eyes flicking left, eyes flicking right, under their eyelash awning.

"Aren't you coming?" the old man asked. "I am willing to help you."

Mount Rushmore boggled at him. Triphammer and Puddleduck, with infinitely greater presence of mind, shook their heads silently.

"What's the matter?"

"Nary a feather to fly with," they said. "We *told* you that, pooper. We're stuck, that's what."

The dear old goat stepped back into the ship and nibbled his mustache.

"Are you sure you can't follow me?" he asked.

"Can't."

"You could if you wanted."

"Can't."

"Why don't you just give it a try?"

"Can't, and that's that."

"Well, what are we to do, then?" the old man asked. "It seems we are at an impasse."

He thought. They all thought, except Harold. He watched. He witnessed.

Then the old man said, "I have it. I knew I'd think of something. Mechanical means."

And hardly were the words out of his mouth when the lights came on in the room, at first flickering as dim as the candle, then coming up strong and smiling.

The phone rang. Puddleduck answered.

"Quack?"

"Kiss us," the excited face in the visor said. "We've made the auxiliaries putt. We can limp to haven."

"Grats," said Puddleduck. "But can't we blif for home?"

"No way. The mains will have to be made anew."

"Oh," said Puddleduck, and rang off.

"Can you come along now?" asked the old man.

The ship limped where he directed, and in time they came to a planet, green as Eden. It wasn't half bad, except that it wasn't near anything. They went into orbit around it, keeping close company with a small pitted whizzer of a satellite.

"That's my seat, that rock," said the old man. "That's where I sit to oversee when I visit. This is one of my planets. It's small, but it's a good home. If you will love it well, nurture and tend it and take good care of it, I'll lend it to you. How about that?"

"Done," they said.

"Done it is, then," said the old man. "Well, I must be about my business. I'll check back shortly to see how you are getting on. If you need me, sit on my rock and give me a call. I'll show up in no time. Now, if you will excuse me."

"Wait, wait," they said. "Before you tippy along, we must know—who are you, freaky old pooper?"

"You may call me Landlord Thing," the old man said. He turned to Harold. "Are you coming?"

Harold looked at his parents with one quick sweep of his eyes, and then he shook his head as fast as a suckling lamb can shake its tail. "No," he said. "Thank you."

Landlord Thing took a hitch on his shorts and stepped lightly through the wall into space. Then, just as they were opening their mouths to speak of him, he stuck his head back through the wall one last time.

He said, "Mind you, take good care of my world."

And then like a guru skipping barefoot through Himalayan icefields he was gone.

SKY BLUE WAITS for Landlord Thing. He has a heavy gun in his hands and he means to bling the Thing good and proper. That's what he is there for, sitting on that dinky rock in space.

His mind wheels with the high heavens above. His mind whirls with the bare brown planet below. His mind is ground to flour between great stones.

He thinks, "Come. Come. Come and be killed."

THEY CALLED THE PLANET Here or East Overshoe or This Dump. They didn't love it. They didn't take care of it. They didn't nurture and tend it, or any of the other stuff they promised. They didn't plan to stay, so why should they?

They called themselves Groombridge Colony. As soon as they fixed the drive, they meant to tippy along. They meant to blif. They meant to go. Onward to Groombridge 1618/2 and the way things were supposed to be. After all, they had paid good money.

Since Tripphammer and Puddleduck wanted to get back into the galactic big time worse than anybody—quack, yes!—they were in charge. Like proper leaders, they exhorted everyone to do his utmost.

Recall: to fix the drive, the mains had to be made anew. To do the job, they needed some of This, some of That, and some of the Third Thing.

They didn't wait a moment after they set down. They dug shafts like moles.

They built towers like ants. They hammered and smoked and smelted and forged. They electrolyzed and transmuted. They ripped and raped and turned the planet upside down in the search for what they needed. They turned the green planet brown, these Groombrugians. They really made a mess of things.

Here's the hard part. This is rare in the universe. They came by it in no time. That you can't just buy at any corner store. They found twice as much as they needed. But the Third Thing, which everywhere else is common as dirt, was elusive as the wild butterfly of love. After years and years they had barely accumulated a single pood of the stuff, and that wasn't nearly enough.

When they were planning to leave East Overshoe come morning, the Groombridge gang cared naught a tiddle what they did to the planet. When it sank in finally that they weren't leaving all that soon, there were some who began to worry what Landlord Thing might make of their handiwork.

It wasn't anything you could sweep under the carpet and smile about. It was more obvious than that. Well, yes.

It was Triphammer who began to fuss about it first. And Puddleduck caught it from her. But it was Puddleduck who thought of the answer, and Triphammer who found it worthy. It often worked out that way. They were a team.

Their answer was to set Sky Blue on that whirling rock to slay their monster for them. Within their terms, it was a perfect solution. Puddleduck remembered that Landlord Thing had said he

would come instanter than powdered breakfast if he were called from that rock. Ha! at their beck, when they were ready for him, and then, bling! Then they would have all the time and peace they needed to rip the planet to the heart. And Sky Blue was the man.

They shook hands on it, and set out to look for Sky Blue. That was what they called Harold now. They called him Sky Blue because he was so out to lunch. But they had need of him now. He could shoot.

Yes, he could shoot. It was one of the things he did that no one else would think of doing. Sky Blue had grown up eccentric.

The heart of it was that he took responsibility seriously. He had been there when the agreement with Landlord Thing was made and he had said, "I promise," in his heart. And like the loser he was, he wasted his time trying to live by his word.

Where things were brown, he did his best to green them again. Futile. Where the Groombridge gang pared and cored the planet, he repaired and corrected. Outnumbered. Where they ripped and raped, he nurtured and tended. That is, he tried. Every day he fell farther behind.

Where it was necessary for balance, he shot things. He would think, "Come. Come and be killed." And because all of Landlord Thing's planet knew he had their best interests at heart, they would come, and he would kill them with love and sorrow.

If Triphammer and Puddleduck were not consummate politicians, hence tolerant, and if they hadn't enjoyed the fresh meat he brought home from time

to time, they would have disowned him. They probably should have anyway. As it was, they named him Sky Blue and allowed him his amusement. And because Triphammer and Puddleduck were Triphammer and Puddleduck, Groombridge Colony went along.

As Mount Rushmore said, speaking for the community, "Pretties need dippies for contrast, nay say?"

When Triphammer and Puddleduck found Sky Blue, their boy was up to his ears in dirt, beaver-ing away making a large hole smaller. In the time it would take him to fill it, three more would be dug in search of the Third Thing, but he was not one to complain. He knew his obligation, even if no one else did, and he lived by it.

"Hey there, dull thud, child of ours," they said. "Muckle that shovel for the mo and hie thee hither. Busyness beckons."

Sky Blue did as they directed. He stuck his shovel in the sand and hurried over to them. He still yearned for their good opinion whenever it was compatible with what he thought was right. Oh, tell the truth—he might even strike a compromise with right for the sake of their good opinion. They had him hooked.

"Yes yes," he said. "Progen loxies, put my knucks to your purpose."

"Oh best bubby, trumpets for your eagerness," they said. They produced the gun, Groombridge Colony's most powerful splat-blinger, and placed it in his hands. "Elim Landlord Thing for Mum and Dad, that's a good dumb-dumb son."

"Bling Landlord Thing? Where?

Why? Oh, say not!" And Sky Blue tried to return the gun to Triphammer and Puddleduck, but they would have none of it.

"Yours," said Puddleduck.

"Yours," said Triphammer.

"Nay, nay, not I," said Sky Blue.

Triphammer said, "Do you treacle-drip for This Dump, nurdy son of mine?"

"Certain sure, I do."

"One boot, two boot, when the rent is due, and out go you. You lose."

"Misery mort," said Sky Blue. "Me, too? But no—holes ubiquate. I'll screege from view."

"Ho, ho, Hermit Harold, all by his onesome," said Puddleduck. "You lose."

"Unhappies," said Sky Blue. And he looked at the equalizer in his hands. "What what? Oh, double what what?"

Triphammer drew close and whispered sweet in his ear: "Bling him to frags, and lovings and keepings."

How's that for a promise?

SO SKY BLUE WAITS for Landlord Thing. Above above. Below below. He sits on that rock, the call gone forth, and waits.

And there Landlord Thing is! The old man wades through space toward the rock where Sky Blue sits.

Trembling, barely able to control himself, Sky Blue raises the gun in his hands—butt coming up to his shoulder, muzzle swinging down to point. The gun is aimed, centered on the brushy mustache. And Sky Blue pulls the trigger.

A beam lances and there is a blinding flash. The face piece of Sky Blue's

spacesuit polarizes at the glare.

He casts the rifle from him into space, sobbing. His eyes clot with tears. He cries harder than he can remember, as though he has lost forever his last infinitely precious hope.

But as he sits there desolate, a pseudopod wraps comfortingly about his shoulders and a warm voice says, "How have things been? Tell me about them."

Sky Blue turns his head and opens his eyes. There, sitting beside him on that unnaturally comfortable rock, is Landlord Thing as first he saw him through the tight pinched curtains so long before. Warm brown eyes and pseudopods.

"Nothing is right," says Sky Blue. "Look down there at your planet. It's been turned to brown. Nobody likes it there on your world but me. Everyone else wants to get away and no matter how I try, I can't clean it up."

"That isn't the worst thing in the world," says Landlord Thing. "We'll see what can be done. Follow me."

He shifts around to the other side of the rock and Sky Blue follows.

"This is the top side," says Landlord Thing. "Now look."

Sky Blue looks up at Here. It fills the sky above him. He is overflowed with a great warm wave of mystery and awe. It is momentarily too much for him and he must close his eyes and look away before he can look back again.

"I never realized," he says.

Landlord Thing says, "You can heal the world. You can make it green again."

"Me?" says Sky Blue. "No, I can't."

"Oh, but you can," says Landlord Thing. "I have faith in you, Sky Blue."

Sky Blue looks at him in astonishment. He hasn't told Landlord Thing his new name.

"How can I do it?" asks Sky Blue. "I don't know how."

"You must take yourself out of yourself and put it in the planet. Nurture and tend the planet. Make it well again. Concentrate very very hard. Look at the planet and spread yourself so thin that you disappear."

Sky Blue is unsure. Sky Blue does not believe. But Sky Blue is determined.

He looks up at Here, dominating the sky like a great mandala. It is a wave—he drowns. It is a wind—he dissipates. It is a web—but he is the spinner, spinning thin, spinning fine, losing himself in the gossamer. He handles the world tenderly.

Landlord Thing watches. Landlord Thing witnesses. And above them in the sky, the world turns green.

When Sky Blue reassembles, he is not the same. He looks once at Landlord Thing and smiles, and then they sit there in silence. They have called. They wait for their call to be answered. And after a time a ship lifts from the planet and comes to the rock.

It is Triphammer and Puddleduck. They wave to Sky Blue as though he were alone. He and Landlord Thing go aboard the ship. Triphammer and Puddleduck act as though they are blind to Landlord Thing's presence. Sky Blue removes his spacesuit.

Triphammer and Puddleduck say, "Gasp, splutter, quack! No, no, no!"

(Continued on page 89)

It seemed at first a simple problem: the man who had hired him had feared murder, and now he was missing. But who would want him dead? The clues all pointed in a single direction—one that made no logical sense at all. But perhaps that was to be expected on the artificial planet Dosomy, where men lived for pleasure and—

ONLY THE STARS ARE REAL

ALAN W. STEWART

Illustrated by STEVE HARPER

I

THIS WAS MY THIRD visit to Dosomy. After leaving the second time, I had sworn that nothing would ever make me return. I'd been wrong. A promise of eight thousand credits and a chance to test my newly regained self-respect had proved to be enough incentive.

I was seventeen the first time I came to Dosomy, fresh out of school and eager to pit my certified manliness against the trials of the most complete center for human pleasure ever devised. It took us—me and my three school friends—a full week in which to shatter all our inhibitions. We started by trying a little of everything any of us had ever wanted to try. We finished by pushing each other into going just a little bit farther until, one by one, we cracked and headed for home. I left Dosomy that first time with a feeling that there had to be something else in the universe. I couldn't have seen and done it all so early in my life. I spent the next twenty years searching

for what I hadn't been able to find on Dosomy.

I never found it. Finally, I gave up trying and headed back to Dosomy, where it had all started. During the previous six months I had managed to lose two legs and a wife. I was a broken down former soldier of fortune who had not only quit searching the universe, but who had forgotten what it was he was looking for.

My wife's name was Charlotte. She was beautiful, wonderful and filled with a virtuous kindness. I loved her. Eventually she had her fill of holding my hand and trying to tell me that all would soon be right with the world. When she left me, I came to Dosomy, intending to drown my sorrows and my bank account.

Sometimes a person thinks he knows himself pretty thoroughly, and maybe he does. But what if there's more to him than he ever realized? What if underneath the normal, very respectable person he knows, there's some-

body else, a stranger, another personality entirely?

During my month on Dosomy, that second individual clawed his way out from underneath and took charge of the controls. He forced me to do things I had never wanted to do before or since, things that still kick a hole in my armour of self-respect every time I think about them.

It took me a month to regain control of my own impulses. It took another month at home, away from all that Dosomy represented, before I could look at myself in the mirror and see the person I had once thought I knew so well.

Now, five years later, I still wasn't certain I had recovered enough to face Dosomy again. The spaceport with its flashing neon signs, its recorded pitches and come-ons, brought back half buried memories of dingy hotel rooms and plastic parlors of pleasure and pain.

I moved nervously through the port, clutching tightly at my luggage, trying to find a free aircab, one that wasn't running a direct express to one of the palace-hotels.

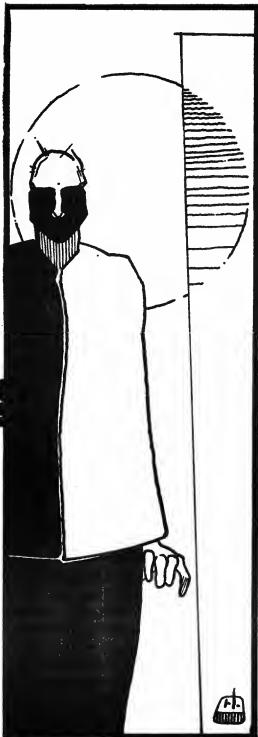
I finally found one, and gave the driver the address I wanted. He struggled to suppress a laugh and failed.

"Calvin Harney's place. huh? You don't look like one of them, you know."

"One of what?" I asked, all innocence.

"Ah, you know," he said, waving his free hand at me. "One of those reformer guys. You want to put an end to all this?"

He used his waving hand to point



at the city spread out below. The thousand dancing lights of the pleasure palaces winked at us through the thin clouds. Dosomy. Planet of pleasure and of pain. Ten thousand and one thrills. Whatever you want, mister, we get it for you. Only thirty and forty—no higher prices. Come on, go right on inside. Little Miriam, our hostess, just follow her. Don't miss this. The real thing. Revealing. Satisfying. Raw. *Dosomy*.

An artificial world, designed and constructed a couple hundred years ago by a multi-billionaire named Quimby. Tired of rushing all over the galaxy in order to have his tastes satisfied, he'd had it all brought home and built on Dosomy. The name itself was an anagram of sodomy. Even Quimby's sense of humor had been a bit perverse. Until his death, only he and a few selected companions had used the planet. In his will, Quimby turned the entire world over to free enterprise. The various attractions were auctioned off to the highest bidder. In a matter of years, Dosomy had become the biggest tourist attraction in the galaxy. Thousands of men and women (adults only—please) flocked to the palaces every month, pouring millions of credits into the planetary treasuries. Dosomy was a plastic planet, a vast fantasyland for dirty old men.

We were flying over the residential section of the city, an area largely unknown to Dosomy's millions of tourists. But they were all there—the doctors, lawyers, shopowners. Every planet had to have them. Even Dosomy was no exception. These people formed a silent majority, willing to tolerate the sin

in their midst in order to turn a quick buck. The man I was going to see, Calvin Harney, had appointed himself spokesman for this group. The cabbie had called him a reformer. All I knew was that he was afraid of being murdered.

The aircab landed on the lawn of a huge mansion, bigger than some of the more famous pleasure palaces in the city. I left the cabbie chuckling over his fare and knocked on the door.

A girl answered. She was young, blonde, cute and shapely. She had been crying.

"Who are you?" she asked, pleasantly enough.

"My name's Stewart. Wendall Stewart. I have an appointment to see Calvin Harney. He should be expecting me."

For a second, I thought she was going to start crying again. Instead she stared at my bulging suitcases, a look of incomprehension crossing her face.

"Mr. Harney isn't home right now. I'm his daughter, Lynda."

"Didn't he tell you about me?"

She shook her head.

"I'm a politician. I was supposed to work with your father on his campaign. He said I was to stay here."

She went back to staring at my suitcases. After a moment, I cleared my throat, loudly and impatiently.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stewart. Please come in. I—I don't mean to act this way but . . . Something awful has happened."

I followed the girl inside. The living room was spacious and luxurious. After we had seated ourselves, I waited for her to speak.

"I think my father has been mur-

dered," she said at last. "By those—those . . ." Her voice cracked. She started crying. I sat there watching her, trying to decide whether I should ignore her tears or cross over and put my arms around her. Before I could make up my mind, she stopped, wiping her nose carefully with a paper napkin.

"He disappeared two nights ago," she continued. "He just dashed out late at night. Didn't say where he was going. He never came back." She sniffled into the napkin.

"No idea where he went?"

"None. He was always running off like that and not saying a word to anybody. I didn't think a thing of it. Not until yesterday. He'd never stayed overnight before. I knew he wouldn't do it without calling me."

"That doesn't necessarily mean he's been murdered." I tried to make my voice sound soothing. "On a planet like this, a lot of men must skip out for a night or two."

The girl looked at me as though I had taken the Lord's name and buried it in garbage. Her eyes flew open in shocked disbelief.

"No! Not my father! You said you were supposed to be here to help him. Don't you even know what he stood for?"

I was quite aware that Calvin Harney had decided to set himself up as a protector of morality. I was also aware that such men usually have their—ah, personal foibles.

"Forget it," I said. "Have you contacted the police?"

"Yes," she nodded. "For all the good it will do. They're all tools of those men. They're glad to see my father

gone. They don't want him back."

"I asked you this before, Lynda, and I really didn't understand your answer, but why are you so sure your father is dead?"

She showed me the palms of her hands. They were very clean.

"It's the only answer."

"I don't see that. Even if the pleasure bosses grabbed him, wouldn't they be more likely just to hold him, till after the election is over?"

She shook her head, once. It was a definite shake.

"Not them. They wouldn't take the risk."

I took a deep breath, settling back in my chair. I had three options. I could stick around and hope that Harney showed up and that he was all right. I could pocket the money I had received so far, and go back home. Or, lastly, I could reveal everything to the girl and let things go from there. I decided on the third choice. I didn't like waiting and I didn't like quitting. Besides, I had come to Dosomy for a reason quite apart from the job. I wasn't ready to leave yet.

"Do you want your father found?" I asked her.

"Why, yes, of course, but—"

I held up a hand to silence her.

"Your father made a deal with me, Lynda. He thought somebody was trying to kill him. I was to come here and protect him. It looks like I may have gotten here too late."

"I thought— Didn't you say you were a politician?"

"I did and I am. But I do other things on the side. You can think of me as a troubleshooter. What I want to know

is, do you want me to find him? If he's alive, I'll bring him to you. If he's dead, I'll find out who did it."

"Can you?" she asked.

I shrugged. "Why not?"

"I don't think you know what you're up against here. Every pleasure owner on this planet hated my father. They'd do anything to stop him. They're not going to let you poke your nose into things. The police are on their side. Everybody is. You'd be dead faster than my father."

"I'll take that chance. I've been thoroughly briefed on the situation here. All I want you to do is agree to keep up the weekly payments your father promised me. The risks are all mine."

She thought, pulling at a strand of golden hair with her fingers.

"It's a deal," she said. "But you haven't got a chance."

"Do I stay here or should I—"

"Oh, no. I'll have one of the men take your luggage upstairs. We have plenty of room here. It's just me and my father—" She started crying again.

I excused myself politely, leaving her alone with her tears. I found a servant, a grisd old man of eighty or more, and had him find me a room.

We went up a winding staircase. When we got to the room, I had the old man drop my luggage on the bed. I handed him a ten.

"Tell me about Mr. Harney," I said.

He started to hand the ten back. I held my hand up.

"It's nothing like that," I said. "I'm working for Lynda; my job is to find out what happened to Harney."

He paused for a second, then quickly

stuffed the ten in a pocket.

"What you want to know?"

"Do you think he's dead?" I sat on the bed and lit a cigarette. I tossed the flaming match on the rug and watched it disappear.

"Nope," said the servant. "He's alive."

"You're sure?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

He seemed surprised at the question. His mind clicked through a variety of evasions. Finally he settled on one.

"Just a feeling," he said.

I let it ride, regretting the loss of the ten. "Can you get me a photo of Harney?"

"Guess so."

"Bring it up soon as you can, and one more thing: Do you or any of the other servants know where Harney went the night he disappeared?"

"We were all off-duty by then. It was real late. Around two, maybe three in the morning."

I sat up on the bed and opened one of my suitcases. I pulled out a half full bottle of Meridian Vinotaur, an excellent liquor, potent and cheap. I tilted the bottle to my lips, taking two hasty swallows. I wiped my lips with the back of a hand.

The servant was frowning at me, his mouth puckered up with disapproval.

"Mr. Harney don't believe in drinking," he said.

"If Harney's dead, it doesn't much matter how he feels, does it?" I asked. "And if he's alive, I think he's got a lot more to worry about than my drinking habits."

After the servant left, I puttered around, unpacking and rearranging. When everything looked suitably neat, I climbed in the bed and lay down, letting my legs relax. They hummed softly at me in a tuneless drone. I listened for awhile, then turned on my side and fell asleep.

II

WHEN I WOKE five hours later, it was dark. A photograph of Calvin Harney sat on my chest. He was tall and ugly, his mouth twisted in a toothy grin. He had short, close-cropped grey hair, a bent and crooked nose, and squinting eyes. He reminded me a lot of somebody I had once known and disliked.

Lynda was waiting downstairs, eating alone in a cluttered dining room. She gestured for me to join her. I sat down at the table, shaking my head.

"Thanks, but I'm really not hungry. Traveling gives me the stomach jitters. Can't eat anything solid for a week."

"Have some wine at least. It's very good—imported." She was smiling and cheerful, at least on the surface. She passed me a small glass of red wine. It was rich and sweet, with a pungent aftertaste.

"Uh, Lynda," I started. "Could I ask a couple of things of you—some questions?"

"I guess so. Sure."

"Well, first, I need a favor. Could you give me a letter or something—anything with your signature on it—authorizing me to speak for you? Don't mention my searching for your father. I'd rather keep that a secret. But I need the letter. It'll be a big help, making everything a little official."

"Of course, Wendall, but— Well, don't you think this is hopeless? Do you really think you have a chance of finding him?"

I shrugged. "I'll find him—one way or the other."

Her smile was a lot like her father's, only her teeth were cleaner and in better shape.

"You're a very determined man," she said. "Tell me, are all men from System like you?"

I shook my head. "Nope. Most of them are lazy and shiftless. They sleep all day and drink all night." I let her giggle at me for a moment before breaking in. "But—the questions . . ."

"Oh, yes, the questions."

"I need the loan of an aircar. At least for tonight. Do you have a spare?"

"We have two. I won't be using either, not for a while at least."

"Fine, and one more thing. This is a question. What can you tell me about this guy, Robeson, the one that was running against your father for supervisor?"

She screwed up her mouth in an expression of distaste. For a second, I thought she was going to spit.

"He's nothing, just a lackey of Kaplan's. That's all. I think he started out as a doorman at one of the palaces and worked his way up. He didn't stand a chance in the election. They had to get rid of my father."

"Who's this guy Kaplan?"

She sighed. "That's what I mean, Wendall. There's so much you don't know about this place. Kaplan's the biggest man on Dosomy. Marcus Kaplan. He owns half the palaces in the city."

"I think I've heard the name. How do I go about finding Robeson?"

"He manages the Sadian Starlight. Nice name, huh? It's one of Kaplan's palaces. I suppose he's usually around at night."

"Good. Now if you'll write that letter for me and have the aircar readied, I'll be on my way."

"You're not going there? Isn't that—?"

"Dangerous?" I finished. "Sure it is. So what?"

She laughed at me.

I smiled back. "I guess I'm pushing the tough guy role a little hard, aren't I?"

"Not really," she said. "You're convincing."

We talked for another half hour while she finished eating. She spoke in soft, hushed tones that I found remarkably appealing. She seemed like a good girl. I liked her.

I was telling her about my first trip to Dosomy, the one right after graduation, when the servant interrupted to announce that the aircar was ready. Lynda had already written the letter of authorization and I had it safely tucked away in a pocket.

"Thanks for the wine," I said, getting up to leave. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Good luck," she said.

"Thanks and by the way, I thought your father didn't approve of drinking."

"Who told you that?"

"The old servant caught me sneaking a couple swigs upstairs. He got very agitated."

"Father is very strict about sin," she

said. "But you know what they say about the mice playing while the cat's away."

We laughed together.

It was a perfect night for an aircar ride. The single moon was full and bright and the stars looked down at me with hope and good cheer. I glided through the crisp night air, the top down, letting the cool breeze whip through my hair. I felt happy and peaceful, at one with the universe.

But every night on Dosomy is perfect for an aircar ride. It never snows and it never rains. There aren't any clouds to mar the view. The stars always shine and the moon is always full. Of it all, only the stars are in any way real. The rest has been created by man, in vague, dissatisfying imitation of nature.

I stopped at the local tube office and sent a message to a friend on System, a very big man with total computer access. I needed dossiers on two people, Marcus Kaplan and Calvin Harney. The clerk on duty told me a reply couldn't be expected before the following morning at the earliest. I left a number where I could be reached and disappeared into the night sky.

I remembered the Sadian Starlight from my two previous visits. It was the largest and most complete pleasure place on Dosomy. The front half was strictly a legitimate nightclub, with the usual assortment of singers, dancers and musicians, imported from throughout the known universe. For an outrageous price, you could obtain an excellent meal in the large dining room. The service and atmosphere were quick and divine.

But the front half was only a re-

spectable pose. When the diners were fat and happy, they stole to the rear and had their innermost desires satisfied with a smile and a brisk wave of the hand. It was all there. The Sadian Starlight had been designed so that the King of Sardinia could come to Dosomy and find everything he wanted in one place, without any need to go pawing through the streets, rubbing against the diseased masses.

A Gormian was serving as doorman. He was fully humanoid except for pale yellow skin and non-existent ears. He was slightly over twelve feet high, must have weighed around 600 pounds, and was built like an over-stuffed gorilla. I walked up to him, smiled, and handed him my cards and letters.

"How do I get to see Jack Robeson?" I asked.

"You don't," he said. It sounded more like a growl.

"Isn't he interested in Calvin Harney?"

"He never heard of him. Nobody ever heard of him."

"If I don't get to see Robeson, somebody's going to hear of him."

The doorman looked perturbed and unhappy. Clutching my papers in one huge paw, he used the other to operate a transphone. I couldn't see the view-screen. He whispered into the phone, allowing me to catch only snatches of conversation. At length, he said in a slightly louder voice, "If there's any problem, I can handle the guy, easy." He dropped the phone and flicked off the screen.

He stepped through the doors and into the club, gesturing at me to follow. I fell in behind him. We passed through

a confusing maze of doors and corridors. We rode an elevator, got off, and went through more doors and corridors.

"Am I going to get to see Robeson?" I called after the Gormian.

"Maybe," he said. "Just follow me."

I did, nervously. Without a map, I could never find my way back to the street.

The doorman stopped in front of an office door. There was a sign on it: "Jack Robeson, Private." The Gormian knocked twice.

"Who is it?" A low voice from inside.

"Karlan. With the guy from Harney."

"Let him in."

The door was closed after me. I knew the Gormian would be waiting outside, just in case somebody had to handle me. Robeson was alone. He was a big, red-headed guy. He was no Gormian, but I could see why he had once served as a doorman. A deck of cards was spread untidily across the desk. Robeson had been playing solitaire.

I plopped in a wooden chair across from him and passed over my papers. He didn't seem terribly impressed.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Calvin Harney."

"Who's he?" His smile revealed a set of decaying molars. The only people who have teeth like that any more are the ones who like them.

"Let's not play games, Robeson. I'm not here to cause trouble. I've got a problem and I figured you could help me with it. I got here today from System. I was supposed to help Harney in the campaign. Instead, I find he's

gone. His daughter thinks somebody had him murdered."

Robeson was unimpressed by my frankness. He glared at me, reaching out for his cards and shuffling them slowly.

"You accusing me?"

"Nope."

"Then what do you want?"

"I want to know what I should do. I came here to do a job. I'd like to do it and get paid. What I want to know is whether Harney is going to show up before the election. If he's not, I'm going back home."

"How the hell should I know?"

"Don't get me wrong. I said I wasn't making any accusations and I'm not. But, let's look at this plainly. When a candidate for high office disappears on the eve of an election, who should one suspect of pulling a snatch?"

"I don't follow your logic, mister."

"And I don't follow yours."

He pulled a card out of the deck and sent it flying through the air. It landed in front of me, face up. A king of diamonds. He flipped the next card over, letting it land on the table in front of him. It was an ace of clubs.

"Good card," he said, indicating my king. "But not good enough." He laughed slowly, letting it come from deep in his stomach.

"Stewart—that your name?" he asked. I nodded. "You know how elections are run here?"

"Computer setup."

"That's right. We got a big computer on this planet, down underground, beneath everything. Every three years we have an election for supervisor. Anybody wants to can try. All he has to

do is write up a platform and a set of campaign promises. That stuff, plus the guy's personal dossier, is run through the machine. It compares everything, trying to figure out which candidate is the best for Dosomy. Click, click, click. Five seconds, we got a winner."

"Harney."

"Who you trying to kid?" He was laughing again. "He didn't stand a chance. The palaces have always had the supervisor. They always will. Why should I snatch Harney? Why should I have him killed? You want my opinion? I think the guy split. I think he knew he was going to lose and he got out."

I wasn't listening very closely. I had to distract Robeson's attention somehow. There was a little brown book sitting on his desk, five inches in front of me. On the front of it was printed, "Appointments—March." I wanted that book.

I reached out and took the deck of cards out of his hands. As he watched, entranced, I shuffled them, carefully but quickly, and passed them back to him. He cut.

I started dealing, flipping the cards face up on the table, first to myself, then to Robeson. I had three kings and a jack. He had two aces, an eight, and a seven. I dropped my fifth card. A deuce. No help. I peeled his fifth card off the deck with my thumb and flipped it across the table. It scooted along the top of the desk and toppled over the side. Robeson's chair creaked, as he bent down to retrieve it. Keeping my eyes fixed on him, I reached out, grabbed the appointment book, and

quickly stuffed it in my inside coat pocket.

Robeson's face grinned at me over the edge of the desk. His hand appeared with the card in it. Another ace.

"Looks like you lose," he said.

"Guess so."

He cleared his throat. "Take my advice, Stewart. Go back home. I don't know where Harney went. I don't care. He was nothing but a minor pain to any of us. Even if he does show before the election, it doesn't matter. He's going to lose no matter what. Save yourself some trouble. Take the next tug home."

"Maybe I will," I said.

"If you don't, stop by some night. We'll play some more cards." His laugh was the same, low and ugly.

Karlan was waiting for me on the other side of the door. Wordlessly, he escorted me through the same confusing maze of doors and corridors. Outside, he took his place at the door.

"Be seeing you," I said. He grunted.

I made my way through the parking lot back to my aircar. Dozens of richly dressed people passed me, heading for the palace. In the strong moonlight, all of them looked pale, ugly and artificial.

I turned on the light in my car and leafed through Jack Robeson's appointment book, looking for familiar names. I had a hunch. It probably wasn't worth the risk, but . . .

I found what I was looking for. March 17, 11:30 P.M., a note: "Harney called. Will be here at two."

March 17 was the night Calvin Harney had disappeared.

I heard a noise from outside the car and felt a presence. There was a

woman standing outside, trying to get my attention. I turned off the light, stuffed the book back in my pocket, and opened the car door a crack.

The woman was middle aged with a beat up face and running cosmetics.

"Can you tell me where the Venusian Palace is located?"

I was about to tell her that I didn't know when I noticed something wrong. The woman had a stunner in her hand, pointed through the door.

There was a sudden flash of light. My body felt like I'd been struck with a massive sledge hammer. I couldn't move. I struggled to speak, to move my eyes.

I could hear voices. I felt myself being lifted out of the car and carried.

"Hit him again," said a masculine voice. "I can't stand it when their eyes are open."

Above me, I could see the stars and the moon. The night air was cold. I wanted to shiver, but I couldn't remember how.

I was lifted into the air again and dropped on a soft cushion. I could see the open roof of an aircar.

"Finish him now," said the voice.

I struggled to speak. I wanted to beg them not to kill me. I was sorry I had stolen. I would never do it again.

All I could say was: "Gaa."

Then the hammer hit me again and I couldn't see anything.

III

I WOKE UP HUNGRY, with a splitting headache. I was lying flat on my back on the floor of a tiny, unclean room. Two rickety wooden chairs were the

only furniture. Both were occupied. The woman with the stunner was in one. She still had her gun. It was pointed at my head. A broken-faced man of indeterminate age slouched in the other. I rubbed the back of my head and pulled myself into a sitting position.

"Would it sound stupid if I asked where I was?"

"It wouldn't," said the man, "but nobody's going to tell you."

I tried to stand. It seemed to take forever, but I made it, still a little shaky.

"Don't I rate a chair?" I asked.

The man looked at the woman. She looked at me, then nodded. The man got up, unlocked the door, and left. He returned in a minute or two, carrying another wooden chair under his arm. He dropped it in front of me and I sat down. It was uncomfortable.

I fidgeted, watching my captors intently. They didn't let it bother them. From the amount of time it had taken the man to get my chair, I gathered I was being held in one room of a house. There was no way of telling how many more enemies might lurk outside the door.

"What do you people do for fun?" I said. "Cards? Dice? Sex? Or do you just hold sparkling conversations with each other?"

"Shut up," said the man.

"What are you going to do with me?"

"I thought I told you to shut up."

I turned to the woman, using my eyes to plead for consideration.

She gave it. "We don't know what's going to happen to you. We're just

doing a job. When we know, we'll tell you."

"Who's going to tell you?"

She snorted. "You really must think we're stupid. Sorry, mister, no names mentioned."

Suddenly remembering something, I tapped my pockets. They were empty.

"I got your stuff in there." The woman indicated a large leather handbag sitting beside her chair.

"The notebook?"

"You mean Robeson's? Yeah, it's in there. Don't let it worry you. He's not pulling you out of this one. What are you doing with his appointment book, anyway?"

"He gave it to me," I said. "He couldn't get anybody to keep their dates."

She almost let a smile crack her mask of cosmetics.

"I'm going to get me something to eat," said the man, interrupting. "I'll bring him back a bite."

"Okay," said the woman. "But hurry it. I'm getting sleepy. One of us is going to have to knock off pretty soon."

The man left. She got up and locked the door after him, dropping the key in her handbag. She sat back down, resting the stunner in her lap.

"Don't try anything. I'm quick with this."

"Yeah, I know," I said, rubbing the back of my head.

The man returned about fifteen minutes later, hauling a foldaway cot under one arm. I watched from under half-raised eyelids as he set it up in a corner. He left again and came back with a pillow and two blankets.

"I'll knock off first. Wake me in a

couple hours and I'll take over. Watch out for him. He's a pro."

I opened my eyes and looked at them. "Why don't both of you get in?" I said. "I'll watch you." It wasn't my usual style, but I was getting bored.

The woman reacted first. She bolted out of her chair, crossed the room, and slapped me in the face.

"Don't talk that way about me." Her voice was tight and controlled, her face red with anger.

The man ignored us both and crawled between the blankets and shut his eyes.

"Watch out for her, Stewart," he muttered. "She's a real tiger sometimes."

They were a strange couple.

A great deal of time passed, but it was impossible to tell how much. The room was windowless and neither of my companions did much talking.

Their mysterious boss was becoming increasingly unpopular with the hired help. The man spent more and more time outside the room, saying that he was trying to make contact. I stayed in my chair, eyes closed, either napping or pretending to. While the man was out of the room, the woman twice turned her back on me. I passed up both chances. It all looked too simple.

The third time she turned away, I couldn't resist the temptation. I stepped silently out of my seat, picked up the chair, and hit her over the head with it. She hit the floor with a thud, rolled on her back, and moaned.

I stepped back out of the way and waited for the man. He charged through the door, bending over the woman's unconscious body. I stepped

from behind the door and tapped him on the shoulder. When he turned, I buried my right fist in the softness of his stomach. He bent double. I raised both hands over my head, locked them, and hit him on the back of the neck. His face hit the floor first. The rest of him quickly followed.

I rubbed my hands together in satisfaction. It all seemed so easy. Thud, slap, crack and it was done.

I went through the woman's handbag, retrieving my wallet and keys. I grabbed the appointment book and stuffed it back in my pocket.

I was in a house, all right, old and unfurnished, apparently unoccupied. I walked outside. I was in a residential section of the city. Around me, on all sides, were dozens of giant communal apartments. Two blocks away from the house, I found a public transphone. First I got hold of an aircab. After that, I called the tube office to see whether a reply had come through on my transmit. It hadn't. I asked them to hold it, when it did. I'd be checking with them all day.

The aircab arrived promptly, settling down nicely between the spires of the quarter mile high buildings. I gave the driver the Harney address. This one was less aware than the last. He didn't laugh.

"Who's going to win the election?" I asked once we were in the air.

"You're from off-planet, ain't you?"

I told him I was. "How can you tell?"

"Nobody on Dosomy asks a question like that. Kaplan's man is going to win. Always does, always will."

"You don't think Calvin Harney's got a chance then?"

"None. Lot of people like the guy. Makes them think of God and stuff. But I mean, let's be reasonable. This guy wants to get rid of the palaces. What's left of Dosomy after that? I'll tell you: Nothing's left. The guy ain't got a chance."

The driver was still filling me in on Dosomy economics, when we landed on the lawn of the Harney estate. The old servant opened the door when I knocked.

"Where's Lynda?" I asked.

"She doesn't wish to see anyone at the moment," he said.

"She'll see me." I carefully picked him up under both arms and set him down outside. I stepped through the open door and slammed it in his face. I was beginning to see why so many people used android servants these days.

I found Lynda in the living room watching a transmit. I leaned in the doorway, waiting for her to notice me. When she didn't I coughed.

She looked lovely when she was surprised, her big blue eyes open wide, her cute little mouth hanging open.

"Wendall!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet.

"That's right," I said, strolling into the room. "What's the matter? Your pals didn't tell you I got loose?"

"Pals? What pals? What are you talking about? When I found out you hadn't come back last night, I was so worried—"

"Drop it, Lynda," I sighed. "You're a lousy liar. Let me give you some elementary help. Next time you hire somebody to keep me out of the way, tell them about the legs. They come

off, you know. I don't get very far on two stumps."

"Wendall, please. I still don't know what you're talking about." I was wrong. She could give a convincing performance. But the evidence was against her. The servant joined us, trying to decide how he was going to go about throwing me out of the house.

"Go up and get me my bottle," I told him. "You know where it is." He looked at Lynda. She nodded.

I crossed the room and sat down next to her. We waited in silence until the servant returned. I jerked the cork off the Vinotaur and took a swallow. When the servant left, I turned to her, smiling.

"You really want to know what I'm talking about?"

"Yes. Yes, of course."

"I'll give you the complete blow-by-blow rundown. Let's make a game out of it, okay? We'll pretend I'm the prosecutor, see, and you, you're the judge. Only you're not only the judge in this case. You're also the defendant. Now, wait a second." I held up a hand. "Don't interrupt. You can't do that in a court of law. You'll be held in contempt."

She nodded slowly in puzzled agreement.

"Okay, let's get started. When I left this place last night, you made a trans-phone call to a couple of friends. You told them I was a bad guy—an enemy of your father's. You wanted me grabbed. You told them where they could find me and when.

"They found me all right. I got stunned and taken to an old, broken down house about ten miles from here. Your friends held me there all last

night and most of today. About an hour and a half ago, I finally decided that they were as amateurish as they'd been acting. I hit the woman over the head with a chair and knocked the man out with my fists. Don't worry, they'll recover. Then I took an aircab over here.

"That's the story. Now, for the evidence. What went wrong? How did I get on to you? Simple enough. Only two people could have done it: You and Robeson. I knew it couldn't be him. First off, he would never hire such obviously amateur help. If he wanted me put out of the way, I wouldn't have escaped. Besides, he didn't have a motive. Only one person knew I was anything but a politician. That was you. I made an effort to conceal everything from Robeson. There was only one thing that could have made him suspicious. While I was in his office, I copped an appointment book off his desk. But your people grabbed me too soon. He couldn't have noticed that the book was missing, figured out who took it, and hired two goons to get it back, not in less than five minutes. And, besides, when my captors found the book in my pocket, they couldn't have been less interested in it. No, Lynda, it couldn't have been Robeson. That left only you. To nail everything together, I made an immoral suggestion to your hired lady. She flipped out over it. Only one kind of person would get that upset over such a minor incident. One of your father's friends.

"It's circumstantial. I'll admit that. But it's the only explanation that fits. There's only one question I've got left that doesn't have an answer: Why? Why did you do it, Lynda?"

While I was talking, her face had passed through an amazing multitude of emotions, from fear to anger to humiliation and finally to grief. When I finished, she switched back to anger.

"You want to know why, huh? I'll tell you why, Stewart. Because I wanted you dead, that's why."

"Then why am I alive?"

"Because I'm chicken. Rub my nose in it, if you want. You seem to enjoy doing that sort of thing. But it's the truth. When I had you there, I couldn't go through with it. You want to know why to that one, too? Because I liked you. That was the whole problem. I wanted you dead, but I liked you too much to have it done."

She was softening me. She'd stopped acting now, and I was beginning to feel like a heel. But there was still one thing I had to know.

"Why did you want to have me killed?"

"I'll show you," she said. She stood and opened the housecoat she was wearing. She pulled it down to her waist and turned around, showing me her back. The flesh was red and black, covered with deep partially healed cuts and heavy slash marks. It looked as though her whole back had been exposed to a meat grinder.

"Your father?"

"My father." She pulled the coat back over her shoulders and fastened it. "Now do you see why I didn't want him found? If he was dead, I wanted him to stay that way. If he was alive and in hiding, let the son of a bitch stay there."

"Why didn't you tell me all this when I got here?"

"It's not the sort of thing one tells a stranger. Nobody knows what kind of man my father was. Nobody, only you and me."

"Why?"

"He liked it. Can you see it? Calvin Harney, the great reformer, got his kicks beating the hell out of his daughter every night."

"And you wouldn't leave?"

"You don't think I didn't want to? I tried. Lots of times I tried. Once I even got away. I was gone two days and three of his people came after me and brought me back. Wendall, I was afraid of that man. I was frightened to death of him."

I stared into my empty bottle. I let my eyes lift and locked them with hers.

"I'm sorry. I know that sounds stupid, but it's all I can think of to say."

The servant interrupted us with a cough.

"What is it?" Lynda asked.

He crossed the room and whispered softly in her ear. As he spoke, her eyes widened in surprise, but it was impossible to read any other expression in her face.

She said nothing after he left. I waited patiently, knowing that something important had happened, but still feeling guilty over the treatment I had given her.

At last, she spoke. "I don't know whether I'm supposed to laugh or cry or just sit here feeling stupid. My father's been found out in the rough. He's dead." Then she started to cry, mostly from sheer relief, but partially, too, from grief. It's not easy to hate your own father, no matter how badly he may have treated you, not when he's

just been found dead.

Lynda asked me to go out and look at the body. I borrowed the aircar and flew out to the rough, the unessential and unpopulated grasslands that border the city. When Dosomy had been created, all that was really needed was a city. The rest of the planet was nothing but waste, beautiful and natural, but still waste.

The body had been found about three miles outside the city limits, lying near a creek. I found the chief officer and identified myself to him.

"Who found him?" I asked.

"Some campers. A lot of people come out to the rough and play around in their free time. The body was right along a main hiking trail. It had to be discovered eventually."

"How long has he been dead?"

"Couple days maybe. Not much more. It's hard to tell. The body's been mangled, legs cut off, entrails removed."

"You made a positive identification?"

"Yeah, the face and hands are intact. We got finger and lip prints off him. It's Harney all right."

"I take it he wasn't killed here." The land around seemed so pleasant and untouched. It was difficult to conceive that a murdered man lay over the next rise.

"No, somebody dumped him here. Stupid place to put him. Right along the trail. If the killer had tossed him a mile back in the rough, nobody might ever have found him." He shook his head. "I hate to think how many bodies might be lying out there in the sun right now, rotting away."

"Could I see the body?"

"Sure, go ahead. It's right down by the creek."

I walked to the body alone. It was a hot, windless day, dry and unpleasant. There wasn't much left of Calvin Harney. Only his face was unmarked. Unseeing eyes stared at the heavens. Even in death, he still reminded me of somebody I hadn't liked.

I crouched next to the body and went through his clothes. Either the cops or the killers had cleaned him out, probably the killers. The cops hadn't mentioned finding any identification on him.

I ran my fingers through his hair, rolled him on his back and looked underneath him. There was nothing. Then something caught my eye. Three fingers were missing from his left hand, but what was left of his fist was clenched tightly shut. I pried open his hand and removed a round silver object, about an inch in diameter, from his grip. I stood and walked back over the hill to the officer.

"Seen all you want?" he asked.

I nodded. "All I'll ever want," I said.

I didn't examine the object I'd found until I was in the air again. It was what they called a passcoin—they're used in the palaces as house-currency, an old and honored custom that has followed gambling a long time: an up to date version of gambling chips. I turned it over and looked at both sides. I'd seen its like before. It came from the Sadian Starlight.

IV

I FLEW DIRECTLY BACK to Lynda's and reported to her, leaving out any men-

tion of the passcoin. She started to cry, telling me she would double my fee if only I'd find her father's killer. I told her that wouldn't be necessary; finding the killer was part of the original agreement. She tried to explain why she was crying for a man she had hated. Since I was pretty certain I knew, I excused myself, went up to my room, opened another bottle of Vinotaur, and tried to think.

I didn't like the passcoin. It was too simple, too pat, too obvious. A crew of professionals would never have missed it. If Kaplan had really ordered the killing, it would have been professionally done.

But a plant didn't make sense either. Why try to put the blame on Kaplan, where it would never stick? If the police had found the coin, nothing would have happened. The case would have been quietly dropped, forgotten, and marked unsolved. On Dosomy, the police belonged to the palaces, and they in turn belonged to Kaplan. But the police hadn't found the coin. I had. It was a discovery I was coming to regret.

I called the tube office to see whether my dossiers had arrived. They had. The clerk told me he could either read them over the phone or I could come and pick them up. I told him I would be along in a few minutes.

I took the aircar and flew downtown. The dossiers were my last lead, about all I had left to go on. The whole case seemed so full of irrelevancies that it was next to impossible to separate the essentials and work on them.

It was late afternoon. The sky was hot and filled with fliers and aircars,

large and small. Giant twenty and thirty passenger models floated through the air, running shuttles between the palaces. Two girls, neither much out of their teens, dropped in front of me, forcing my aircar to make a sudden change in altitude. They waved at me and I waved back at them. Somehow it helped to reassure me that all was right with the world.

I sat in a corner of the tube office and read over my dossiers. Everytime I saw one, it filled me with wonder. Each galactic dossier contained a man's entire life, neatly arranged in dots, dashes, and digits. Some were long—most were short. I was proud of my own. It was a good deal longer than most people's.

Kaplan was a second generation palace owner. He had inherited his father's already sizeable holdings when he was twenty-five and quickly built himself an empire. It was estimated that he currently owned or controlled somewhere around sixty per cent of Dosomy's gross wealth. He was a tall, good looking man, well loved by his mother, wife and child. He had never been arrested and had served two unblemished years in special service, feeding starving natives on Meridian. From his dossier, Marcus Kaplan sounded very much like a successful combination of Henry Ford and Peter Pan.

Harney's history was as different as could be, containing more than a few surprises and unanswered questions.

He had been born on the planet Spurgeon, a dependent of System, originally developed by a sect of Christian pilgrims known as the Spurgeonites. They believed in very little, mostly

God, morality, and discipline. They disbelieved in a good many things, including drinking, dancing, womanizing and space travel. Sex, according to the Spurgeonites, should be used only as a tool for continuation of the species. Because of this belief, they tended to multiply rapidly, while gaining few recruits from outside. I had heard of them and their planet. They were crackpots, but dangerous only to their own kind.

Apparently Harney had gotten himself into some sort of trouble on Spurgeon. When he was twenty, they had exiled him. He took the first available tug to Dosomy and went to work in the palaces. By the time he married at thirty, he was assistant manager in one of Kaplan's smaller places. A good Spurgeonite would have said that he went directly from heaven to hell, with no stop in between.

Lynda had been born two years after the marriage. Harney's young wife died while giving birth to her daughter. Apparently as a direct result of his loss, Harney went through one of those instant conversions that seem to happen so frequently to saints. He quit his job and devoted himself to raising his daughter and trying to stamp out indecency on Dosomy. He had run for supervisor twice and lost badly both times.

The dossier did pose one question I wished it had answered. If Harney quit working over twenty years ago, how had he managed to live in the meantime? It sounded like an intriguing question and I only wished I knew the answer.

I stuffed the dossiers in my pocket

and walked outside. Karlan, the Gormian doorman from the Sadian Starlight, was waiting for me. I looked at his hand. Unlike most of my recent greeters, he wasn't holding a stunner. But at twelve foot and 600 pounds, he didn't need one.

"Get in," he said, pointing at an aircar parked in the street.

"Why?" I asked.

"If you don't, you're going to get hurt. Mr. Kaplan wants to see you—right away." His voice still sounded more like a growl.

I shrugged, walked across the street, and got in the aircar. Karlan slid into the seat beside me and wrapped his huge paws around the instruments.

"Don't try anything while we're in the air."

"I won't," I promised. "I want to see Kaplan as badly as he wants to see me."

"I bet."

Karlan landed the car on the roof of a tall building in the center of the city. We got out, walked down a flight of stairs, and found ourselves in a plushly furnished penthouse apartment. Two men were waiting for us. I had met only one of them before, but I had a picture of the second man in my pocket.

Marcus Kaplan spoke first. "Sit down, Stewart. I've heard a lot about you lately, especially from Mr. Robeson, here. I think the two of us have a great deal to talk over."

I started to sit, but Robeson was at my side. He grabbed hold of my shirt, and hoisted me to my feet.

"Where's my book—?" he started.

Kaplan cut him off. "Let him down,

Jack. I'll take care of this."

Robeson released me. I dropped in the chair, trying to rearrange my shirt front.

"What is this all about, Kaplan?" I said. "If it's the book, I've still got it. I can bring it back to you."

"It's not the book itself that worries me, Stewart. It's what you may have found in it. Mind telling me what that was?"

"You know what it was," I said. "Calvin Harney had an appointment to see Robeson here on the night he was killed."

"And you think Robeson murdered him?"

"No!" It was Robeson. "Harney never showed up. He was supposed to come over, but he never showed."

Kaplan held up a hand for silence. "Shut up, Jack. When I want you to talk, I'll ring a bell. Got that?"

Robeson nodded. Kaplan turned back to me.

"Mr. Stewart, another question, if you please. Do you think I had Calvin Harney murdered?"

"Everything points that way," I said.

"Everything?" he questioned. "You mean just this one appointment."

"More than that. You see, I got a look at Harney's body. I found something in his hand. It was a passcoin. From the Sadian Starlight."

Kaplan gave a sudden start of surprise, before he caught himself. Robeson wasn't nearly so good at hiding his emotions. He looked frightened.

"That doesn't mean anything."

"But it does. I'll tell you what it would mean to me, if I were a cop. It would mean that before he died,

Harney tried to leave a clue that would lead to the capture of his killer. It would mean that the passcoin was that clue. And that passcoin, Kaplan, would mean you."

"And the police know this?"

"They don't," I said. "Only I do. I didn't think it would do much good to tell them, since they're your police."

"You seem to have learned a lot about our planet in the short time you've been here, Mr. Stewart. But what you don't know is that this murder has turned out to be more complicated than it seemed at first. If this were only a local thing, I wouldn't worry about it at all. I wouldn't even worry about your passcoin. I would be slightly irritated to learn that someone was trying to frame me for murder, but only slightly so."

"But you're more worried than that, Kaplan. Mind telling me why?"

"Not at all, since you seem so free with your information. Calvin Harney was a candidate for high office. He was running against Mr. Robeson, who happens to be an employee of mine. Any such murder is going to be of interest to people other than our local authorities."

"In other words, System is coming here to investigate and you don't own them."

"Precisely, and now, Mr. Stewart, would you mind giving us a reason for not dealing with you?"

"Because you're not stupid," I said, hoping I was correct. I knew what sort of "deal" Kaplan had in mind. "And because it wouldn't do you any good. Even with me out of the way, the evidence still points at you. They'll get

to you if I disappear, even if they don't get you for Harney's murder. I'm sure somebody saw your Gormian pick me up today. But that's just a reason for not killing me at this moment. I've got a reason why you shouldn't kill me at all. You see, I don't think you killed Calvin Harney and I think I know who did." I wasn't telling the complete truth. Actually I was far from certain on either point. Still, it seemed a wise thing to say.

Kaplan seemed to agree. For the first time since I'd met him, he smiled. It didn't look right on his face.

"I didn't kill him, you know. I had no motive. But it isn't going to be that easy to convince the authorities, I'm afraid. They just don't understand the way things are on this world."

"Then you're not going to kill me?"

He shook his head. "No, as much as I'd like to, it wouldn't be wise."

"Good," I said, jumping to my feet. "Then how about answering some questions for me?"

Both Robeson and the Gormian started toward me. Kaplan waved them back. He was smiling again.

"Go ahead, Mr. Stewart. After all, you've been honest enough with us. What is it you wish to know?"

"Did you know Harney worked for you about twenty years ago?"

"For my father, to be exact. But, yes, I was aware of the relationship."

"Then maybe you won't mind explaining why you've continued to support Harney for the last twenty years."

Kaplan was a hard man to ruffle. He was still smiling. "What makes you think I have?"

"I know Harney hasn't worked since

he quit your father. I also know he's been swimming in money ever since. It hasn't come from off-planet. If it had, it would have reflected in his dossier. It has to have come from right here, on Dosomy. You're the most likely suspect."

"And why is that?"

"Blackmail."

Kaplan stopped smiling. Robeson looked frightened.

"You're starting to make me think I made a mistake in deciding not to kill you, Mr. Stewart. But this time, you're wrong. There was no blackmail involved. Oh, yes, I admit I have supported Calvin Harney for over twenty years. But it was all legal. I merely paid him for services rendered.

"You have no idea how difficult it can be, trying to keep ahead in my line of work. People come to Dosomy, they stay a week or two, and they go home. They feel they've seen it all, made the grand tour. Why should they ever come back? Next year they go to Earth or Vega. We can't live that way. We have to convince these people to come back to Dosomy.

"That was Calvin Harney's job. He had a very clever and very dirty mind. He was a brilliant thinker and an even more brilliant designer. Over half the techniques and devices in use at the Sadian Starlight came from his mind. He did his job very well. Very well indeed. I was more than happy to pay him equally as well."

"Didn't Harney find his work for you just a little, ah, incongruous?"

"I think he preferred to think of it as ironic, taking my money and then using it to defeat me."

"Do you have any proof of this?"

"None at all, I'm afraid. Obviously Harney preferred not to have any records kept. Since there are no personal income taxes on Dosomy, it was all quite legal."

"Do you need anything more out of me, Kaplan?"

He shook his head. "No, I think not. I wanted to meet you. I hope I don't regret it later."

"I hope so, too," I said. This case would be much cleaner if Kaplan did turn out to be innocent.

I left with the Gormian, stopping just long enough to memorize the number on the transphone. I had a feeling I might want to contact Kaplan later. I doubted that his number was normally available.

It was late when I got back to the Harney estate. I'd stopped a couple times along the way, checking out hunches, mostly in the area of imports and exports.

Lynda was waiting up in the living room. She was living an Existo, but not, it seemed, very alertly. The characters were busily berating her for missing her lines when I cut them off.

"Hope I didn't disturb the show," I said, entering the room. "I'm tired and I wanted to talk before I went to bed."

"No, that's all right, Wendall. I'm afraid I wasn't living very well. The characters were rather unhappy with me." She smiled and I sat down next to her. "Want some wine?"

I told her that would be nice. She filled my glass.

"Where've you been all day?"

"Oh, checking around, here and

there. No real leads, I'm afraid. And I had a talk with Marcus Kaplan."

That startled her. "How did you ever get to see him?"

"It was his idea. He snatched me off the street."

"Wendall, I— Did Kaplan kill my father?"

"I don't know," I said.

"But it seems so obvious . . ."

"Too obvious, maybe. That's what scares me." I wanted to change the subject, before we got in too deep. "Lynda, how many servants do you have?"

"Why, just three."

"Are they all human?"

"Yes, father didn't believe in androids. He always said he wanted people he could talk to. I wasn't going to argue with him. It made me feel better, having someone else human around, especially when father was . . . that way. Why do you ask, Wendall?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing important. Your father didn't change his mind did he, not recently?"

"Not that I know of. But he didn't confide in me that much."

"No, I guess he wouldn't." I drained the last of my wine and stood. "I better go on up, Lynda. I've got a long day tomorrow. Better get some sleep." I yawned in an effort to lend credibility to my performance and made a hurried exit.

It took a long time before I fell asleep. My dreams were troubled, filled with floating visions of vast porny palaces, long slashing whips, and silent, faceless androids.

I WOKE THE FOLLOWING MORNING to a sudden and unexpected development. I had a bad hangover. Vinotaur was supposedly guaranteed hangover proof, but apparently the manufacturers had forgotten to inform this particular bottle. I crawled out of bed, gobbled a handle of pills, and waited for the pain to relax.

When I began to feel slightly less fragile, I got out of bed again, opened my suitcases, and removed my audio-recorder. I took the machine back to bed with me, lay down, and started dictating.

It was late morning before I finished. Twenty-two neatly typed pages lay at my side. I bundled them up, stuffed them in my briefcase and dressed.

I ran into the old servant at the bottom of the stairs. He told me Lynda had gone out shopping for a few hours and would see me when she returned. I shooed him out of the room and flipped on the transphone. It was time to see whether my import and export man had come through with the information.

"Hello, Roland," I said, when his pudgy face appeared on the screen. "Did you get what I wanted?"

"Oh, Mr. Stewart. Yes, yes, I did. Hold on please, just for a moment and I'll dig up the papers." I could see Roland in the background of the screen, pawing his way through a mountain of papers and graphs. I was impressed with his speed and determination. But I needn't have been. Roland had been very well paid.

His face was back in the screen, grinning at me in success.

"Did you find it, Roland?" I asked.

"Ah, yes, I did, Mr. Stewart, and it wasn't no simple task, let me tell you. We do a lot of business here. Things going in and out every day. You'd never believe our volume."

"Probably not, Roland. But what about those specifications?"

"I was getting to that, Mr. Stewart. It was just like you thought. Mr. Harney ordered an android about a month ago, presenting very detailed specifications, too, I might add. It arrived two weeks ago, and he came in and picked it up, personally."

"You told me that yesterday. Did you find the specification chart?"

"Well, yes and no, Mr. Stewart. I have them, but—"

"What do you mean—yes and no?"

"I mean I have the chart, but the picture's gone. Usually, we take a picture of every new android, when it comes in. But there's nothing on this one."

"Forget that. I'll just assume Harney paid you not to take it. If you've got the chart, hold it up to the screen, and let me get the figures."

He held the paper up to the screen, hiding his face with it, while I jotted down a few notes. I told him to take it down.

"Is it usual for the requested specifications to be so exact?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Stewart, not at all. Most people just tell you they want a tall one or a red-headed one or something like that. Not Mr. Harney. He was very specific. Said something about an old family servant breaking down and how

he wanted an exact duplicate. Said he didn't want the kids to know the old one was on the junkpile. Mr. Harney's children were very fond of the android."

"I'm sure they were," I said. "I'll try to make it over this afternoon, Roland, and square off our account."

"I'd appreciate that, Mr. Stewart. Business has been pretty slow this month, and every little bit helps. I'm sure you know that." He gave me his address, then repeated it, twice. I told him I wouldn't forget it and flipped off.

I stood staring at the screen for a moment, watching it dim and searching my memory. There was still one point left uncovered, a minor one that might take months to pin down thoroughly. There wasn't time. I decided to chance an appointment with Marcus Kaplan. It was a calculated gamble, but one I thought would pay off.

Kaplan's eyebrows jumped a notch, when he saw my face on the screen. It pleased me to know that I had finally succeeded in rattling him.

"How did you get this number, Stewart?"

I took advantage of the opportunity to laugh at him. I enjoyed every chuckle. "It was easy," I said. "But it's improper to reveal secrets of the trade."

"Well, what do you want, anyway? It may interest you to know that I'm aware you had my dossier sent for. I don't like that, Stewart. I want to give you a warning—"

"Don't get worried, Kaplan. I told you yesterday I didn't think you killed Harney. Now I'm sure of it. I called you because I wanted a favor. Do it

for me, and maybe we can have this whole thing wrapped up before the investigators even leave System."

His expression passed through a series of drastic changes. Suddenly I was his friend, his ally. "That would be wonderful," he said, savoring each word. "Really wonderful. How can I be of help to you?"

"It's very simple," I said. "What I need from you are the records of all your new employees within, say, the last two weeks. Can you get them for me?"

"Why, yes, I guess so. They're all right here in this building."

"I'll be over in an hour. Tell your men not to shoot me down, when I try to land. I've got to see a doctor, then I'll be over."

"Wait a minute, Stewart. Would you first mind telling me what all this is about?"

"Not at all. I'll tell you everything—in one hour." I flipped off, leaving Kaplan with his handsome mouth hanging wide open.

I found the old servant in the kitchen, preparing a green salad by hand.

"Don't see that done much these days," I commented. "Everybody uses food preparing machines."

He shook his head. "I know. It's hard to find a man who still takes pride in his work."

"I bet you know a lot about this planet, don't you?"

He nodded his head, a bit self-consciously, as if slightly embarrassed by his own knowledge. "I suppose I do know a thing or two. I was born and raised here. Ninety-six years ago, next

month. Never left this place my whole life. Really used to have some times around here, fifty, sixty years ago."

"I bet," I said. "Say, do you realize that you're eligible to run for supervisor—if you wanted to, that is?"

"Well, I suppose I am, sir."

"That's great," I said. "Wonderful. You're just the person I've been looking for." I opened my briefcase and withdrew the papers I had prepared. I leafed through them until I found the lines I wanted. Then I handed the servant a pen. "Sign your name right here."

He glanced at the paper, then back at me, letting his astonishment show. "But, sir, are you serious? This is a declaration of candidacy."

"Of course it is—and also a full platform and a very complete set of promises. It's all you need to win the election. Just sign it, and we're ready to run."

"But I can't win this—"

"Can't win? What kind of talk is that? Of course you can win. You've got a hell of a lot better chance than your employer ever had. It says right in these papers that you're going to run everything exactly the same way the palaces always have, except that you're going to keep your hand out of the coffers. I'm surprised nobody ever realized it before, but Kaplan is wide open for defeat. The only person who ever tried before was Harney, and he was a crackpot."

"I really don't think I should, Mr. Stewart. I'm not a politician. I'm a servant. Always have been."

"Doesn't matter. There won't be that much for you to do, anyway, and, at

your age, you deserve a rest. If you don't sign up, I'm just going out on the street and pick up some bum. You wouldn't want that. Think of this as a tribute, a memorial for Harney. I know you liked him. Now come on, just sign your name here, and we'll be in business."

He did. I dropped the papers back in my briefcase, shook my client's hand, and left. The pleasant part of the job was over. Now the unpleasant part had to begin.

I was an hour late for my appointment with Kaplan. I'd stopped to see the doctor for some technical advice and then filed the election papers for my client. I hoped Kaplan hadn't yet gotten the word about the latest electoral development. I still needed his cooperation if I wanted to finish the case in the next few hours.

But he smiled and shook my hand warmly, forestalling any worries. I sat down across from him and leafed through the folders he had given me.

"These all your new people?" I asked.

"All of them within the last two weeks. That's what you said you wanted."

I nodded. I eliminated folders, one by one, until I was left with the most likely man. His picture showed a bloated, white haired man of indeterminate middle age.

"Can I meet this guy?" I said, showing Kaplan the picture.

Kaplan took the folder from my hands, leafed through it, and made a phone call.

"He's on duty now at the Sadian. He works in what we call the Old

Folks' Home. That's an attraction where people can—"

"I get the idea," I said. "Let's go over there and see him."

"Me? That's impossible. I'm really far too busy today. If you could just tell me what this is all about . . ."

"I think you better come with me," I said, trying to make my voice sound threatening and sinister. "It's very important."

He sighed. "Oh, all right. But let's try to hurry it along. I've got a million things that have to be finished today."

We walked up to the roof and floated across to the Sadian in Kaplan's personal car. We took an elevator from the roof. It went down for a long time and let us off across from Robeson's door. The office was empty.

"I sent Jack to find your man," Kaplan explained. "They should be here shortly."

We waited. I paced the floor of the tiny office, my hands buried in my pockets. I smoked three cigarettes in fifteen minutes.

Robeson interrupted the silence. He entered the office, followed by a short, fat little old man. I recognized his face from the employment folder. I walked over to him and stuck out my hand.

"Hello, Mr. Harney," I said. "I've been looking for you."

It may not have been one of the classical statements of the ages, but it had its desired effect. Kaplan jumped to his feet, letting his jaw hit the rug with a thud. Robeson just stood rooted in place, and gaped. The fat man looked me straight in the eye and tried to force a smile. I left everyone standing in place while I found a chair, seated

myself comfortably and lit another cigarette.

"There's your dead man, gentlemen. Alive and well in the Old Folks' Home."

The old man finally got around to mouthing a string of denials. But his heart wasn't in it. Kaplan waved him to silence.

"What's this all about, Stewart? I've met Calvin Harney. Are you trying to tell me that this—this old man is . . .?"

"It's Harney, all right," I said. "Run a brain wave analysis on him, if you like, but that's him. Any half-way skilled surgeon can change a man that much."

Harney decided to drop the denials. "How did you find out?" he asked. His voice was cold and impersonal.

I turned my attention toward him. "It wasn't hard. I've spent the last couple days trying to figure out who might have murdered you. I couldn't get anything to make sense for me. You may have been a bastard, Harney, but you weren't a big enough one for somebody to kill you for it. Pretty soon, I decided that if nobody had killed you, you had to be alive, somewhere. It was only a matter of figuring out why and where."

Kaplan was getting impatient. "Let's quit playing around, Stewart. How about spilling the whole thing, if you know so much? If this guy is Harney, then whose body was found out in the rough yesterday afternoon?"

I crossed my legs and flashed everyone a smile. "You want a blow-by-blow account? That's fine. It's a specialty of mine. Now just shut up and listen. If I get anything wrong, Mr. Harney, be sure to correct me. You know even

more about this thing than I do.

"The way I see it, Harney knew he was going to lose the election. If he didn't, he was probably the only man on Dosomy who was still in the dark. He decided it would be much more agreeable for all concerned if he just disappeared, politely. About a month ago, he ordered an android through an importer named Roland. The delivery was made a couple weeks ago. On the night he disappeared, both he and the android visited a surgeon. Harney came out with a new face, and the android got stuck with the old one, including grafted sets of finger and lip prints. With the components removed, the android got himself dumped out in the rough. Androids, the best models, are made out of very human flesh and blood. Out in the open, without any heating devices, they'll start to rot, just like you and me. Oh, sure, if any halfway detailed tests had been run, the android never would have passed for human. But Harney was pretty sure he could avoid those tests.

"That's why he started planting clues, little signposts that pointed at you, Kaplan, and you, Robeson—the missed appointment here on the night of the murder, the passcoin in the hand of the dead android. The police were supposed to put these clues together and deduce the obvious. The case would be dropped, buried and forgotten. Harney would go his own way, officially dead.

"It wasn't badly done. In fact, it might well have worked, if I hadn't stepped in and gotten in the way. I don't know whether Harney realized that System would send agents to in-

investigate any such politically connected murder. How about it, Harney, want to explain that one for us?"

"I guess it really doesn't matter," he sighed. "Sure, I realized there might be outside interference in the case. If that happened, I just assumed the police would take steps to cover up the evidence, including destroying the body. It was a risk worth taking."

"I suppose it would be," I said, "if the Old Folks Home meant that much to you."

"Maybe it did," he said. "Just maybe it did. All of us try to live our lives according to some set of ideals, even if those ideals are nothing but a contempt for everyone else's principles. For twenty years, I tried to lead my life according to the dictates of the Great Spurgeon. What did I ever get for it on this world? Nothing but laughter and contempt. Twenty years of that, having to bow down to people like you, Kaplan, just to earn a living, being the laughing stock of a whole planet, not even being allowed to set foot on the world which spawned both myself and my ideals. No, I just couldn't stand it. I had to break loose, to find something worth living for, before I died. It had happened once before, many years ago, before most of you were even born. I entered this latest election. I even sent for this man to help me, but in my heart I knew all along that I didn't stand a chance. If you've been winning all your life, you can't conceive of the way I felt. I've been a loser ever since the day the elders of Spurgeon exiled me to this hell and I'm beginning to think that I'll continue to be a loser until the day

I die. Why, I can't even be a success when it comes to having myself murdered."

I stood, listening, trying to force myself to sympathize with him. But it was impossible. The only picture I could form in my mind was that of Lynda Harney's back and shoulders, sliced and bleeding.

"I hope you find your satisfaction and success, Harney," I said. "I hope you find it right in the middle of the Old Folks Home. Robeson, why don't you take this man outside for a minute. I think your boss and I have a few things to talk over."

Kaplan nodded his agreement. Robeson grabbed Harney by the elbow and pushed him out the door.

"You're a smart man, Stewart," Kaplan said. "Mind telling me what I should do now?"

"Just like I said. Have a brain wave analysis run on him and try to get him to sign some sort of statement. That way, when the agents arrive, you can get yourself off the hook without any trouble."

"What about Harney?"

"He's all yours. I don't want him and I doubt that his daughter does either. Let him keep his job, if that's what he wants. It can't hurt anybody."

Kaplan laughed, long and hard, letting the final remnants of his polite demeanor fall away. "I like that idea, Stewart. I really do. It'll keep Harney happy and it'll afford me a certain amount of amusement, too."

"I thought it would," I said, getting to my feet. "I'll call an aircab. I'm in a hurry. Have one of your men fly my car back to Lynda Harney's for me."

"Thanks for the help, Stewart." Kaplan followed me to the door, putting a cold hand on my shoulder. "If there's anything I can ever do for you—if you want to make a tour of the palaces before you leave—just let me know. I'll take care of the tab."

"Thanks," I said, dryly, "but like I said, I'm in a hurry."

VI

I FLASHED THE SERVANT a wink as he led me into the living room, letting him know his political future was in good hands. Lynda was living an Existo. I stood in the shadows, watching the transparent forms of the characters as they darted around the room, shouting out their stories.

It was an old piece, adapted from a book, dealing with an ancient Terran family, a story ripe with murder, incest and unorthodox hatreds. I waited until the chapter had died before making my presence know.

"Hello, Lynda," I said. "I see you have a taste for tragedy."

"Not really. It's just that I rather enjoy seeing people who are worse off than I am. It gives me a little satisfaction, anyway."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "Satisfaction is a difficult thing to find." I sat down across from her, trying to find a simple way in which to get across the complex feelings I had.

"Lynda, I've got to tell you something."

"Yes? —What is it, Wendall?"

"I'm leaving Dosomy tonight. I've got reservations on the evening shuttle tug."

Her eyes were still large and lovely. They widened in surprise. "Leaving? But I don't understand. Do you mean you found out who killed my father?"

"No, I didn't. It's just that . . . Well, this thing is too much for me. You've got some very powerful people on this world. If I keep poking around, they're apt to get a little irritated. There's some agents coming in a few weeks—from System. They're being sent to investigate your father's murder. They'll do a better job than I can and it won't cost you anything."

"Cost? Do you think I care about cost. You promised me you'd find out who killed my father. What's the matter with you—you're not afraid of Kaplan, are you?"

"Maybe I am," I said. "It doesn't really matter. I'm getting out."

"Out? All right, then, get out! Get out of this house and get out of this planet! I don't need you!" As I turned to go, she softened her voice, letting the words trail after me as I climbed the staircase. "I'm through with this whole thing. It's not my responsibility any longer. You'll have to bear the burden. I'm warning you. From now on, the blood of my father is on your hands. Do you hear me! Run away if that's what you want—but his blood is on your hands!"

I packed quickly and had the servant phone for a cab. I waited until I saw it drop to the street below before leaving my room. As I passed the front room, I could see Lynda again living another Existo. This one looked like a contemporary love story, but I couldn't be sure.

The aircab flew across the spires of the city on its way to the port. I watched the lights of the lost and dying dreams as they flashed below. All of us have

something important that we want to lose, but most of us never find out what it is. The next time I came to Dosomy, I'd have to try to find it.

—ALAN W. STEWART

(Continued from page 61)

The frust just must bust—screamie-a-deamie!”

Sky Blue is bewildered. He turns to Landlord Thing and says, “I don’t understand a word of it.”

Landlord Thing waves a sympathetic polyp. “It can be that way at first. Listen to them very closely. Concentrate on every word and some of it will come clear.”

So Sky Blue cranes an ear to the words of Triphammer and Puddleduck and concentrates harder than when he healed the planet. And, just barely, meaning filters through. They are nattering about the sudden return of the planet to its original condition. In the process, it seems, their castles have all been thrown down. Their mines are theirs no longer. Their stockpiles of This, That, and the Third Thing have disappeared in a lash flicker. They quabble about what has happened and what they should do.

Sky Blue listens to them until they run dry. Then he shakes his head in wonder.

“Offense. Unfair. Disrespect,” says Triphammer.

Puddleduck nods. “*Wanh* for our importance,” he says. “All toobies.”

Landlord Thing nods. “All toobies, indeed,” he says. “Tell them they are being given a second chance. Their only hope is if they take good advantage of it.”

Sky Blue relays the message. “Return to Here,” he says. “and learn to live there. It’s your one life. Use it well.”

Triphammer and Puddleduck are astounded at these words. Their jaws drop like a gallows trap. Their nurdy son has never spoken to them like this before.

Landlord Thing says, “Come along Sky Blue. I have some people to introduce you to. I think you’ll like them.”

He passes through the wall as though it were nothing to him. Sky Blue looks at his parents one last time, and then he follows. He steps through the wall of the ship and into space.

“I’m coming,” he says to Landlord Thing, striding the stars before him.

Sky Blue has held the curtains clutched tight in his hands this long time. Now he throws them open wide and peaks.

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSIN

ON SALE NOW IN FEBRUARY FANTASTIC STORIES

THE SLEEPING SORCERESS, a New ELRIC Novella by Michael Moorcock.

ONLY THE STARS ARE REAL

F. M. Busby ("Buz" to his friends) tells us he has been, in his long life, a "farm-hand, library assistant, brick-chipper, janitorial assistant, infantry squad-leader, bartender, cabdriver, dump-truck operator, lab and tutorial instructor in physics, teletyper repairman, submarine telegraph cable terminal-equipment technician (which is an Art, not a Science), student drunkard, etc. . . . and that's while I was still clowning around looking for a job." From 1953 to 1970 he was "the engineering talent" for the Alaska Communications System; he retired when the ACS was sold to RCA. A long-time science fiction fan, he published one story in 1957 ("A Gun for Grandfather," in Future Science Fiction) and has recently returned to writing sf on (hopefully) a regular basis. Well, he certainly won't have any trouble supplying a jacket biography for his first book, when he gets to it . . .

OF MICE AND OTIS

F. M. BUSBY

Illustrated by DAVID COCKRUM

ONCE THERE WAS a man who invented things. His name was Otis, but that didn't stop him; he invented things anyway. Otis specialized in inventing machines which you could put things into and different things would come out the other end. Once he invented a machine that you could put dirty wristwatches into and clean wristwatches came out the other end. So he went into the wristwatch-cleaning business until one day when he put a lot of dirty wristwatches into the machine and instead of clean wristwatches, what came out the other end was a whole lot of little-bitty gears and springs and a lawsuit. So Otis got out of the wristwatch-cleaning business with only a few minor damages and went back to inventing things.

Five years later he had invented a

machine which you could put things into one end and the *same* things would come out the other end. To make it easier to carry, he built the machine in two parts, one for each end. So now he could put things into one part of the machine in his kitchen, and they would come out of the other part of the machine which was out in the barn because the kitchen wasn't very big. Otis was pretty discouraged; the machine worked fine, but it took an awful lot of walking back and forth. Still, Otis knew the machine was completed, because there were no more spare parts left in any of the little bins under his workbench. So he decided he might just as well call in the newspapers to interview him about his new machine.

The newspapers always interviewed Otis about his machines. They had interviewed him about the wristwatch

machine, and before that, the machine that you put Scotch whisky into and rubbing alcohol came out. There had been a machine that you put things into and they came out larger or smaller but you never knew which it was going to be. And the one machine that really discouraged Otis: no matter what you put into it, nothing ever came out—nothing at all. So now the newspapers came to interview Otis about the machine that you put things into in the kitchen and they came out the other end just the same as they went in, but you had to walk all the way out to the barn to see for sure that they had.

There were a tall reporter and a short reporter and a fat reporter. "What do you call your machine, Otis?" asked the tall reporter.

"Well, I've been working on it for five years," said Otis, "and most of the time I've been calling it a damn money-eating clatter-barrel. But now that it works, I guess I had better think up a new name for it. Since it doesn't change the things I put into it, and since it is in two parts so as to be easier to carry, I think I will call it The Two-Piece Invariator. That sounds like a good name, don't you think?"

They all nodded, and the tall reporter wrote down "Two-Piece Invertor," and the short reporter wrote "Two-Piece Clatter-Barrel," and the fat reporter wrote "Two-Headed Inventor." This is one of the benefits of a Free Press.

Otis also told the newspapers that this time he did not think he would go into business for himself with his machine. He thought he would go to Washington, D.C. and sell it to the



government, or else maybe he would go to New York and sell it to some big corporation.

So Otis wrote to his congressman and got back a nice letter telling Otis who to see anytime he got to Washington and that the congressman would be delighted to see Otis in person and show him around the city except unfortunately he would be out of town that week. The letter was mimeographed and signed with a rubber stamp; Otis was quite impressed.

The congressman had made a small mistake as to who Otis should see about his machine, but finally Otis located the proper Branch of the correct Division of the appropriate Bureau of the Department that is rightfully-concerned with giving the brushoff to people like Otis. Since he had been carrying the machine with him from place to place, the advantage of two-piece construction was obvious. Otis was becoming round-shouldered, but not lopsided.

There were a tall bureaucrat and a short bureaucrat and a fat bureaucrat. "What does your machine *do*?" asked the tall bureaucrat.

"You put things in *this* end and they come out *this* end just the same as they went in. I'm glad you folks have a nice big office. At home I had to keep *this* end out in the barn; all that walking back and forth got pretty tiring."

"No trouble at all, here," said the short bureaucrat. "Lots of room."

"What sort of power does your machine require?" asked the fat bureaucrat.

"Well, I run it off a doorbell transformer," said Otis. "I had my nephew

hook that part up for me, because I'm scared of electricity. But you just have to plug *this* end in, and that runs the other end too. I had to fix it like that because I don't have any wires out to the barn."

All three bureaucrats were quite impressed with Otis' machine. Everybody had a lot of fun putting things into it, and sure enough, everything came out the other end just the same as it went in. Well, almost everything—seven white mice, one after another, all went in alive and came out dead. "I sort of expected that," said Otis. "One time I was going to make the machine big enough so I could put *me* in it, so I wouldn't have to walk out to the barn, but my cat jumped into it right about then and he came out dead in the barn, so I figured it might be unlucky for me. Especially since it was a black cat."

All the bureaucrats, even the fat one who had owned the white mice, said they were real glad to have seen Otis, but none of them could see how the government could use Otis' Two-Piece Invariator. Now if it only *did* something to things, or if it could be miniaturized and be made easy to carry in just *one* piece—but it was not even the cheapest or most efficient way to kill mice! The tall bureaucrat left to mail some letters. The short bureaucrat had to hurry home because he was expecting a C.O.D. package. The fat bureaucrat sent his secretary out to the cafeteria for some sandwiches and coffee, and he and Otis had a nice lunch together before saying goodbye.

So Otis took his machine to New York and carried it around from office to office until he was so round-should-

dered he had to put roller skates under the two pieces of the machine, but finally he got an appointment with some senior executives of a large industrial concern.

There were a tall executive and a short executive and a fat executive. "I guess you boys must come in sets," said Otis.

He told them the name of the machine ("We'll have to change that," said the tall executive), how it worked ("We'll put Research on it and get the Full Picture," said the short executive), and that he would like to sell it or have it manufactured on a royalties basis ("We'll put Legal on it, and that's *royalties*," said the fat executive, patting his corporation which was what had convinced Otis that he'd come to the right place).

So Sales changed the name of Otis' Two-Piece Invariator to "Modextron, MK IV." Legal presented him with a handsome forty-seven page contract. Research put things into Modextron MK IV and took them out again and tested them to see if Modextron MK IV had changed them any. Then they shoved Modextron MK IV over into one corner and built Modextron MK V, which was streamlined with lots of chrome and little flashing lights. Otis was called in to see them test Modextron MK V, along with the three executives and the head of Sales, a man named Mr. Juggernaut, who glowed slightly in a dim light.

So they put an apple into MK V and it came out the same, and they put a live mouse in and it came out dead, and they put the dead mouse in to see if it would come out alive and it didn't

(Otis could have told them that; he'd tried it with the cat. But they didn't ask Otis). So Mr. Juggernaut said all right it was time to hit the ball with this product, and he led the way to the Conference Room. The sales staff and the three executives and Otis followed, bobbing up and down a little bit in Mr. Juggernaut's wake.

"First we'll hear from M.R.," said Mr. Juggernaut. "That's Motivational Research," he told Otis (who already knew it). A man asked what does Modextron MK V *symbolize* to John Q. Public. Nobody seemed to know, so Otis said that to him it symbolized the way you can put something down for a minute and then you can't find it; it just seems to disappear. Mr. Juggernaut's glow flared, but before it blew any of his fuses, the door burst open and Research people came crowding into the room with armsful of dead mice.

It seemed that every time you put something into either Modextron MK IV or MK V, it came out of both of them. One in, two out; both the same.

After the meeting sort of went to pieces, Mr. Juggernaut said now we'll hear from Product Impact, and a nervous little man asked "Will Modextron MK V create technological unemployment?" Otis patiently explained all over again that his machine did not create *anything*—that you took *out* of it exactly what you put *into* it except you could not take out live mice. For a big industry, these people sure had a hard time grasping a simple fact.

So they locked Modextron MKs IV and V up *tight*, built Modextron MK VI which had a great big place to put

things into, and lots and lots of the ends that things came out of; Otis couldn't figure out why they would want so *many* dead mice. And when they started making such big models, he decided that what they really wanted was dead elephants. But his contract was paying him lots of nice money, so that he could buy all the parts he wanted, and he was working on a new invention: a machine that you put something into and it threw it right back. "This will save all that walking," he said. "These people are going to have to do an *awful* lot of walking to make sure that everything they put in comes out the same in *all* those places."

Otis went to some of Mr. Juggernaut's meetings in the Conference Room, but they didn't seem to make much sense. People would say that the national economy would be paralyzed, and Mr. Juggernaut would glow a little brighter and smile and nod his head. Or someone would say that the government would go under, and Mr. Juggernaut would actually give off little sparks and say "Just keep in mind *who* the government will go under, and we'll be all right!" This wasn't what it said in the pretty colored pamphlets from Sales. They said "Live the Modextron Way!" with pictures of beautiful people standing around the coming-out end of Modextron Mk VI, looking at fur coats and steaming platters of sirloin steaks and heaps of jewelry, and everybody smiling to the ears. Otis finally got an M.R. man to explain it to him, after the man explained that M.R. stood for Motivational Research. "Yes, I know that," said Otis.

"We rent these receivers out, you

see," the man said. "We charge monthly fees and key the programming to the customer's rental bracket. The sets turn on and off according to what schedule he paid for, but all the sets are on for the Basic Issue, like the advertising for next week's Specials. We rate the Specials so that everyone has to go up a bracket to get them. Trust Mr. Juggernaut to have *that* figured!" The young M.R. man was beginning to glow a little bit himself, just thinking about Mr. Juggernaut. "For a hundred dollars a month," he said, "a man can live with nothing but a basic Mk VI and a garbage can! And at least ninety-five of that is sheer gravy for Modextron, Inc.!"

Otis was confused. It didn't help that his new machine when you put things into it sometimes threw them back too hard, and sometimes just dribbled them out a little bit at a time. This was especially discouraging with mice. Otis wished that the Supply Division of Modextron, Inc., would go a little easier on giving him mice for test-subjects. But Supply Divisions give you what they want to get rid of rather than what you want, so there was no help for it; he had mice, and it was not doing either of them much good.

The nervous little Impact man confused him even more. "The farmers will starve to death," the man said; "the railroads and truckers will go broke; in six months Modextron will own everything; *Juggernaut* will own *everybody*!" Otis tried to cheer him up by showing him the new machine, but it hiccupped on the first mouse.

Some days are like that.

M- (for Modextron-) Day was on its

way, though. Millions of receivers had already been rented and installed all over the country. "An *awful* lot of walking," Otis said, but nobody was paying much attention to Otis since Research had watched his new machine throw back a few mice.

Mr. Juggernaut's M-Day meeting was very impressive; the fat executive explained the Opening Ceremony: what they were going to do, he said, was to start the Modextron distribution system up with a Gimmick. The short executive said the first thing to go into Modextron MK VI would be a coupon which would entitle the holder to one item absolutely free, but the renter had to sign up for a higher bracket to actually *receive* the item, of course. Then the tall executive got up to say that the next part of the Gimmick was that there would be a Mark VI receiver set up to feed the conveyor belt which would feed *into* Mk VI. Everybody went off his rocker, and even louder when Mr. Juggernaut said that with this arrangement they would print just one coupon but that every ten seconds the belt could put a coupon into at least 100 million households. "They are only good once a week," said Mr. Juggernaut, "and every time, everybody has to rent into the next higher bracket to collect." Mr. Juggernaut was glowing like a railroad flare by now, but somehow he looked pretty dim to Otis, who didn't know for sure what Mr. Juggernaut was talking about except that it didn't seem to have much to do with mice.

Otis wasn't quite sure how mice had gotten into his inventing business so much, but they certainly had; everyone

seemed to be mice-conscious. For instance, the nervous little man from Impact had come around that very morning and asked Otis for a mouse. Otis liked him, even if he *did* give Otis the wheebies with all that gloom and jitters, so Otis looked for a nice fresh mouse. But the little man didn't want a new one; in fact, he didn't even want a mouse that the machine (which was doing a lot better lately) had thrown back all in one piece; he insisted on waiting for the machine to hiccup when throwing back a mouse, and then he had to carry it away in a plastic bag. But it takes all kinds, Otis always said. So he hurried off to be on hand for the Opening Ceremony.

Modextron Mk VI was really fixed up very nice, Otis thought; the conveyor belt between the two parts of it was running nice and smooth, too. Mr. Juggernaut was glowing just right; not too much, and yet not all weak and flickering as sometimes happened when people were slow to agree with him in the Conference Room.

The young man from M.R. was holding the Coupon on a gold-edged cushion; he was wobbling a little from excitement: just about right, Otis judged, considering the approving look of Mr. Juggernaut.

The nervous little Impact man, though, was not making a good impression. Mr. Juggernaut was trying not to look his way very often, and when he did, he was careful to be smiling *first*. Otis knew that usually when Mr. Juggernaut looked at people *that* way, they came out not much better than some of Otis' mice. It could be, thought Otis, that Mr. Juggernaut is trying to

invent my new machine on his own hook. Otis wasn't worried, though; he had a whole backlog of machines he hadn't even *tried* to invent yet.

Then people began to make speeches. And they kept *on* making speeches, but someone stepped on Otis's foot so he woke up when Mr. Juggernaut was telling all about the coupons. Otis decided that maybe he hadn't understood all those meetings in the Conference Room after all, because Mr. Juggernaut wasn't saying anything at all like what he had said before.

Finally Mr. Juggernaut finished his speech. He turned to the young M.R. man who was holding the Coupon, and said: "In the name of Modextron, I charge you to open the Modextron Cornucopia."

No kidding; he said that.

But when the young M.R. man moved up to put the Coupon on the conveyor belt, the little Impact man jumped out and kicked the young M.R. man very dirty. And then instead of the Coupon, what the Impact man dumped onto the moving belt was this scrambled mouse that Otis had given him.

The Impact man couldn't seem to make up his mind. First he stopped Mr. Juggernaut from grabbing the mouse off the belt and then he dodged back so that Mr. Juggernaut *did* fall on the belt, himself.

Otis was real surprised at how fiercely the little Impact man kept everybody away from the controls while Mr. Juggernaut kept going past on the conveyor belt every ten seconds. It was seven minutes and 35 seconds before somebody managed to turn it off.

There were a tall FBI man and a short FBI man and a fat FBI man. The tall FBI man scribbled in his notebook and said, "I guess he went through forty-five times." The short FBI man said, "And roughly a hundred million receivers." The fat FBI man said, "I don't think the assets will cover 4,500,000,000 coffins, even plastic ones." Every time the M.R. man tried to suggest turning on Modextron Mk VI again just long enough to provide packaging for Mr. Juggernaut, someone would kick him, so pretty soon he kept quiet.

Otis couldn't think of anything to say, and besides he didn't think he would like to be kicked, so he went back to his laboratory and watched his new machine throw back a few used mice which were all he had left now that the government had taken over and closed down Modextron, Inc., including the Supply Division.

Otis was pretty tired of mice, and of FBI men, and of Modextron, Inc., and of executives, and of Sales, and of M.R., and of New York, but especially of mice. So he took his machine apart and used the parts to make one of his old machines—the one that had been so disappointing because nothing ever came out no matter what you put in. He put all the used mice into it, every one. And sure enough, nothing came back out. Then he took that machine apart and put all the parts back in the right bins and went down the backstairs and out of the Modextron Building and went home.

He had a new idea he wanted to work on.

—F. M. BUSBY

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

Is intelligence the same as self-determination? Might a vast computer complex seek to impose a program on the world beyond its circuits? Russell Bates has written stories for Infinity II and The Last Dangerous Visions; the story which follows, he tells us, was "turned out during the 1970 Clarion S.F. Workshop."

RUSSELL L. BATES

"JUMP!" THE CROWD SAID, thirty-four floors below. "Jump!"

Floyd Scales edged further away from the window of his office, his back scraping across uneven stone. The tips of his shoes stuck out two inches over the narrow ledge. Wind plucked at the lapels of his suit and tickled his brow with his hair.

Scales looked down. A single-minded field of humanity looked back at him; six hundred and eighty feet of distance rendered their faces indistinct. But he could feel the heat of their eyes on him.

"Jump!"

He jerked his head upright and fought the dizziness.

"Floyd, please come back in."

He looked back at the window. Dobbs was leaning out carefully, his bald head greasy in the afternoon sunlight.

Scales sighed. "It's too late, Mr. Dobbs." Then: "Worried about the company?"

Dobbs looked stricken. He patted at his pudgy face with a handkerchief. "No, no. I'm worried about you. I'm—I'm trying to think of why you want to do this. And I don't have an answer."

Scales looked at the building across the street. He was young; he had a beautiful, tolerant wife; had a house with two acres of land in Long Island; was one of three most promising candidates for a vice-presidency in the firm of Triangle Insurance. An answer?

"Sometimes there are no answers, Mr. Dobbs."

But Dobbs was no longer at the window. A policeman had replaced him.

"Hey, fella. Want to talk it over?" He looked no older than Scales. He had a similarly lean build, a similarly angular face, and the same bluish beard shadow on his chin. There was one difference: the policeman was scared.

Scales looked away. "No."

"Listen, we've called your wife. She's on the line. Will you at least talk to her?"

Scales glared at the policeman. "That tears it!"

He leaned forward, glanced one last time at the policeman, saw him staring wide-eyed and open-mouthed, tilted himself further and pushed off with his fingertips. The building across the street rushed at him, then flipped up and away to be replaced by the dirty white of the sidewalks. The policeman's shout was lost in the "Ooh!" from the crowd.

Air rushed past him, stinging his eyes, stealing his breath, whipping his clothing. He saw the crowd surging away, saw the street expanding. Only one thought crossed his mind.

Myra.

DR. MILTON KELLER FUMED inwardly but kept an even smile as he led the reporters through the forest of rectangular electronic columns in the lower level of Probability Central. The gaunt, middle-aged scientist's duties ordinarily kept him in the statistical section. But Nolan—*damn him!*—had made no exceptions in setting up his program of public relations tours. On the day he was to finalize a major statistical cross-reference and then depart for a much-deserved vacation, Dr. Keller had been directed—*no, ordered!*—to coddle a group of important reporters.

"Why ATROPOS?" asked the man from *Tempus* magazine. "I mean the name, of course."

Keller nodded. "Atropos was one of the Fates of Destiny. Here, we made up the acronym to mean: Analog Tabulation Rationalizer Of Probability Objectives System. Believe me, it was quite a struggle." The reporters

laughed politely. Keller didn't wait for another question. "Briefly, this system was conceived originally as a function of the Bureau of Census. But the logical extension worked out during research and development was even more attractive. The government decided to go ahead and construct a fully realized installation to employ the system. This is the result so far." He waved expansively and stopped to allow the reporters a chance to look around.

The lower level was four city blocks in area. Glass and metal columns filled with electronic units were ranked like giant library shelves sixteen feet apart, standing at right angles to each other and extending from the floor to the thirty-foot ceiling. Garish white light spilled around the columns and made glistening mazes of copper circuitry and endless bundles of multicolored wires.

"This is the core of units responsible for the higher functions of the ATROPOS complex, ladies and gentlemen," said Dr. Keller. "It's the cerebrum, so to speak. . . ."

CAPTAIN OLIVER WINSLOW LEANED back in his seat and allowed the controls of the 727 jetliner to follow settings in the automatic pilot. He rubbed the bridge of his broad nose, staring absently at a slow-motion cloud sea.

Sid Cousy, the navigator, removed his headset and dropped it idly on his desk. "Captain, LAX sure is making a lot of noise." A thin babble rose from the headset, almost audible as words under the muted roar of the engines.

"Let them," Winslow said, looking at his copilot, who nodded. "Not much

they can do about it. Right, Ray?"

The copilot folded his arms. "Yeah. Never did like LA International, anyway. This should give them a real turn."

Winslow watched several scattered puffs of clouds that protruded from the smoother layer of undercast. They appeared to be rising, but that was only an illusion. The shallow downward angle of the airplane was dropping them into the clouds.

Winslow thought of Julie. He remembered the hurried date for dinner in a Miami restaurant, recalled that their steaks had been late and that he had had to leave for the airport without eating. Julie had gone along with him, had consented to let him buy her a beer. He was paged before she had finished half the glass.

He flicked a switch on the center console and lifted the microphone. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain. We will begin our descent into the Los Angeles area in a very few minutes. Please return to your seats. For your continued comfort and safety, please fasten your seat belts and obey the 'No Smoking' signs when they appear. Thank you."

Why did I do that? he thought as he replaced the microphone. Habit? Well, perhaps one hundred and twenty-odd innocent passengers do deserve some consideration.

There was a knock on the cabin door and Cousy leaned back to open it. A stewardess poked her head and shoulders inside.

"Ollie, is my watch wrong? The girls and I just finished passing out drinks and a snack."

Winslow craned around and smiled briefly. "No. We had a pretty good tailwind. Wasn't much we could do about it. Don't worry. We'll probably be stacked up over LA for a half hour or more."

"Oh, okay." The stewardess grinned and was gone.

A bump shook the plane. Winslow reached out automatically for the controls, then dropped his hands. He sat back again. The downward angle was increasing.

The three men in the cockpit watched quietly as dense swirling white blotted out the view through the windshield. The plane bumped and shuddered, tilting slightly to the left with each jolt.

The clouds thinned and suddenly were gone. Shadow-dark mountains ringed a valley below the clouds.

Winslow glanced at the copilot. "Right on."

The airplane fell with an ever-increasing tilt, angling downward and gaining speed. The jet noise was a piercing scream.

A gray-crested mountain bulked enormous in their path. The world outside the windshield was turning on its side.

Cousy ignored a frantic pounding on the cabin door. An intercom light was flashing, punctuated by an insistent buzz.

Winslow sank down in his seat as the mountain raced to meet the windshield. In his mind was one image.

An unfinished glass of beer.

DR. KELLER POINTED at a compact woman in tweed.

"Dr. Keller," said the woman. "Is ATROPOS fully operational?"

The scientist chuckled; to himself, he ticked off another in a mental list of ten most obvious questions. "No, I'm afraid not. These units you see here are only one-tenth the number we will have when the project is completed. At the moment we are content to program ATROPOS with all government records, census figures, personnel information from both government and private industry, credit and economic records of individuals, insurance and insurability records, and so on. It will be several years before ATROPOS will be able to perform its true function."

A murmur ran through the group of reporters. "Which is?" asked a stocky man at the rear.

Number six, Keller thought. "Well, in theory ATROPOS will be able to tell us much about the probable life-paths and longevity of each person in this country."

The woman in tweed was aghast. "Do you mean it will *know* everything there is to know about a person, maybe even when that person is to die?" The reporters all began clamoring for Keller's attention.

"Please, ladies and gentlemen," Dr. Keller said, waving for quiet. "Please. I didn't say that. Now, it may sound that way to some of you. I assure you that such is not the case. ATROPOS will one day be able to perform marvelous feats of totally accurate deduction. But the system will be operating with facts only. While an epitome of logic, it cannot make up its own facts or draw from that which it could not possibly know."

The reporters relaxed. "What is ATROPOS doing now?" asked the woman in tweed.

"We are currently engaged in supplying supplementary census and population data: births, deaths, immigration, emigration, et cetera. ATROPOS is merely absorbing or returning information, depending on our needs." He paused and shook his head. "And we have found a most interesting attribute of ATROPOS. It's very hungry for information. It actually asks for more data." He laughed.

Some of the reporters also laughed. The woman in tweed did not laugh. "How can it 'ask' for information?"

"Oh, we built in an automatically ascending data storage and retrieval system. As data goes in, ATROPOS opens more storage banks than is necessary. As data is retrieved, it opens banks equal to one-twelfth the spaces vacated. Thus the machine is instantly ready to absorb more information and displays a running account of how much more info it is ready to receive. Electronically, ATROPOS can 'feel' a positive desire for information to fill the gaps. . . ."

VICTOR CHEKHOV GOT THE telephone call about six A.M. Still half-asleep, he shifted his heavy body in the bed and picked up the receiver.

"H'lo." He rubbed his eyes and yawned.

No answer.

"Hello!" Chekhov sat up, now angry. A quick burst of electronic whine assaulted his ear. "Ouch! Goddam!" He held the receiver away, but a melodious series of tones made him listen again.

His face went soft, expressionless. The tones continued for several seconds more, then stopped.

Chekhov hung up the phone, was silent for a few seconds, then got out of bed. He started for the bathroom, taking off his pajamas.

Half an hour later, he was driving to work. An hour after that, he was walking through a railroad yard to a rusted tower. He climbed the stairs, went into the room at the top, put down his lunch pail, and relieved the switchman on duty.

Chekhov went through his duties mechanically, keeping watch over the automatic switching board and monitoring its handling of the trains. Three fast commuter trains rolled quickly through the yard; each was switched to its proper track.

Chekhov thought of his daughter, Mia. She was attending college in Minnesota, staying with relatives. The last letter had told of her near-arrest for throwing a rock at a policeman. He remembered how lonesome he had been when she left and how worried the trouble had made him. He was saddened again by his inability to even talk with her any more.

The monitor display indicated an approaching commuter train; a path of light crossed the screen, filling the length of Track 18. A freight train was pulling in from the opposite direction on Track 16. Obvious: the automatic switches would place the commuter on Track 17, the freight on Track 15.

Chekhov calmly fingered the override switch, then pressed it. He manually switched both trains to Track 17.

Ten seconds later, two speeding die-

sels faced each other on the same track. They closed quickly and collided, shaking Chekhov's tower with a thunderclap of grinding steel.

Chekhov watched the splintering diesels and cars as they ran up each other toward the sky. He saw the tracks burst from their ties. Screams reached his ears. He turned his head and watched with quiet interest as a commuter car tumbled through the air toward his tower. A single emotion played across his face.

Sadness.

"IT STRIKES ME, Dr. Keller," said the woman in tweed, "that ATROPOS constitutes the grossest invasion of privacy imaginable."

Keller's patience was wearing thin; but his voice was level. "Maybe it seems that way, dear lady. But if you will think about it, the concept of privacy actually died in the time of the caveman."

The woman glared at him and scribbled something on her note pad. Keller immediately regretted the remark. But the satisfaction in having said it was still there.

"Now, if you will step this way, ladies and gentlemen," said Keller, "I'll return you to the upper level."

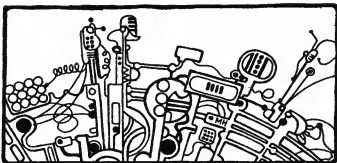
The reporters filed out quietly through the door to the elevators. Keller smiled at the woman in tweed; she didn't return it. He started to follow, but the electronic column nearest the door caught his eye. He walked over to it, studied its activity, noted its number, then went back to the door. He dialed a number on a wall phone and leafed through pages on a clipboard beside it.

(Continued on page 124)

the Science

**GREG BENFORD
& DAVID BOOK**

...in Science Fiction



Standing Room Only— Cultural vs. Biological Evolution

IMAGINE THAT YOU'RE standing on the beach of the little island of Zanzibar. All around, as far as you can see, over the whole surface of the island, people are packed together in one huge jostling crowd. Eight billion people are gathered there, and the crowd is growing. The shoving gets worse. You find yourself pushed down the beach. Pretty soon the water is ankle deep, then knee deep, then waves begin to lap at your back . . .

This is John Brunner's vivid picture of the sheer human masses in an overpopulated world, our world forty years from now. His "non-novel," *Stand on Zanzibar*, takes its title from this metaphor. The book is remarkable for its breadth and force, its literary strengths and weaknesses, and its sweep of ideas. Brunner manages to bring it off amazingly well.

Perhaps the most remarkable side of the book is his portrayal of the *people* of the future—people who couldn't be alive in any year but 2010. To see why this is such a coup, you have to compare it side by side with the sf of the forties and fifties.

Early sf writers clung to a curious contradiction, prosaic characters in romantic settings. All the people are enough like the reader so he can identify easily with them. Types indistinguishable from mid-twentieth-century Americans wrestle

with problems somewhere else—on another planet, in the future, in an alternate universe. Population pressure appeared as a problem of the twenty-fifth century, or the twenty-first, not here and now.

A good example is Cyril Kornbluth's "Marching Moron" series. The background is simple. The world's population grows without bound because medical technology has lowered the death rate, but the birth rate stays high. Low-IQ parents have big families, high-IQ parents have small ones, so the average intelligence of the world's population drops year by year. By 2050 or so, the average man is so stupid that the greatly outnumbered 18 5495 Amazing 11-12 SM Editorial Standing Room Only

These stories are good entertainment. The technical side is another matter. There is no way any trait in the population at large could change that fast without organized selective breeding. Even though unskilled laborers have always had more children than white-collar workers (who are presumably brainier), morons have fewer children than college professors, and idiots scarcely ever reproduce. The "bell-shaped" curve in IQ may get a little lopsided, but the average can't fall off much.

J. G. Ballard's "Billennium," written in

1960, is another example. It pictures the housing problem roughly three-quarters of a century from now, when laws restrict living space to four square meters per person. Apart from the incredible population density, the story could easily have been about people facing the London housing shortage after World War II.

Both these examples treat the affairs of humdrum people, people "just like you and me." The characters in *Zanzibar* are different. Although they're mostly English and American, their speech, dress, customs and interests are not like ours. They don't do and say the things we would in their place. And that's how it should be. 2010 isn't now. It's forty years off, forty years full of changing styles, changing headlines, changing outlooks. To the people of 2010, we'll be old-fashioned, stodgy, not quite real. And if we could meet them, they would seem a little strange, behaving according to motives we lack.

If you fell asleep and, like Rip Van Winkle or Kornbluth's Honest John Barlow, awoke after many years had passed, you would feel the full impact of social change. Adjusting to it would be a painful ordeal. Even without dropping out for twenty years, many persons suffer hardships from change. They can't understand why customs and gadgets don't work the way they used to. The faster things change, the more widespread and intense this suffering gets. This is what Alvin Toffler calls "future shock." It's a byproduct of galloping technology—and if technology gallops too fast, we'll all lose our emotional equilibrium. However future shock manifests itself—in bewilderment, depression, or obsessive longing for the unreachable good old days—it's a serious threat.

Everyone is a potential victim. Most people can convince themselves of this from their own experience. Foreign travel,

or even a few hours spent in a strange ethnic neighborhood—Polish or Jewish or black, for example—show that it's true. The normal cues we need to guide our behavior are missing. People don't use the familiar greetings, they don't have the same heroes and enemies. We lose our sense of belonging. Much of our basic knowledge of how to get simple things done becomes useless. In extreme cases of dislocation, like those sometimes experienced by Peace Corps workers in Latin America or displaced refugees from Indo-China, the sense of wrongness can destroy the individual's ability to function. This is "culture shock." No one who has had even a taste of it can doubt that the similar changes wrought on our lives by time are equally sweeping and profound.

So here's a dilemma. If adjusting to life in Moscow or Afghanistan is so hard, if all-digit dialing and men with long hair provoke so much resentment and confusion, how are we going to understand the twenty-fifth-century citizen of a hypothetical Solar Federation? How can we fathom a Martian's thought processes?

We can't. Every time an sf writer does a stock piece of future fiction, he runs head on into an insoluble problem. Either his characters are inscrutable or they're phony. Often he skips character development entirely because of this. In its place he puts descriptions of gadgets, science lectures, or grotesqueries like intergalactic warfare.

Writers of second-rate historical novels cop out in exactly the same way, but without any excuse for it. After all, historians know a lot about life in the Roman Empire or Henry VIII's England—from eyewitness accounts. But it doesn't show up often in fiction. What did the Emperor Claudius do if he had a headache or hay fever? Did Henry's lemans find the stench of horse manure (which filled every city

in the land) offensive?

Science fiction doesn't even have a chance at realism unless the writer sticks close to the world he and we are at home in. If he strays too far, his credentials as an observer of human society lapse. Even if he only goes a little way into the future, he has to show that it *is* the future. He has to try to create an impression of strangeness, a realistic air of unreality.

Brunner knows this. *Zanzibar* is set in the not-too-distant future; it deals with problems and situations that are akin to our own; and the characters are recognizable descendants of ourselves, slightly but convincingly altered.

The same is true of the world they live in. The pace of life is more frenetic. The burden of involvement in the troubles of billions of other human beings is more maddening. The television programs are more strident, the violence more irrational, the pressures more inescapable. The reader comes away thinking, this is the way it's going to be.

But why? Since Ecclesiastes there have been people who asked, What is it all for? Is this the way men are supposed to live? In recent years the ranks of the questioners have grown. Many thoughtful persons are becoming restless and uneasy.

The question is more than an expression of a lack of confidence in our own era. Every life form ever studied has a natural or preferred environment, within which it flourishes. Outside this environment it languishes and dies. What is Man's proper environment?

Is it barbarism? Or pre-industrial civilization? Is it the overcrowded polluted world in which we find ourselves at present? Statistically, mankind is certainly flourishing. But this growth resembles the short-lived explosive increase of a species without natural enemies. Like the deer of the Kaibab plateau after men had slain all the mountain lions, we are destroying

our habitat through the demands created by our unchecked numbers. If this were our natural environment, we wouldn't have it long.

Change is what trips up all attempts to define Man's natural environment. Societies change, and men change the world they live in. If there was ever a halcyon "natural" human society, it has long since disappeared, buried beneath millennia of these changes. No other organism modifies its environment so rapidly.

One thing is clear. If there is such a thing as a natural or optimum environment for humans, in the same sense as for streptococci or guppies or moose, our relationship with it should be stable. There would have to be a balance, neither altering the other drastically. This implies a stable population. It probably also implies an end to innovative technology, though not to all forms of creative expression. There would have to be some guarantee against dramatic social change—not laws, but some arrangement based on fundamental biological drives.

Given human nature, this will never happen. Apparently, then, things will go on as they have. Since there must be an eventual limit to the number of human beings this planet can support, some new factor will have to come into play to halt the upward climb of population. It might be a massive breakdown of social organization, lethal pollutant levels, or nuclear war. But catastrophic it will be.

Man, as a rational animal, has no business letting this happen. But he is helpless against the threat of Armageddon because cultural evolution has far outstripped the biological. Overall understanding of the world and how to do things increases geometrically from generation to generation. Human fitness to use it, though, has not advanced since the first murderer who raised a stone axe

against his neighbor in a political discussion.

The laws of natural selection apply to Man, as to any other organism. On the average the fit survive longer than the unfit, and so have more offspring. If whatever makes an individual "fit" is inheritable, the children will tend to live longer and have more children of their own. Ultimately a useful trait that might have first appeared in a single person through a mutation will spread to the whole population.

Few people stop to think what a painful, ruthless process evolution is. In order for long-tusked elephants to evolve from their pig-like forebears, millions of generations had to live and die. Millions of proto-elephants had to die young of starvation because their tusks weren't quite long enough for scraping up vegetation, or be gored by better-endowed rivals disputing their mating claims. How did deer acquire their speed and distinctive coloration? Millions of almost-deer died under the claws of predators because they weren't quite fast enough or well enough camouflaged. In the same way, we are born able to withstand certain illnesses and adverse conditions because billions of men and women and children died lingering anguished deaths long ago. They lacked the resistance to disease or climatic extremes that we, the heirs of their stronger contemporaries, now have.

Natural selection hasn't left Man perfectly equipped even for life in a pre-civilized society. He has a back that sags or slips out of alignment with scarcely any stress and teeth that rot in his head. He has a vermiform appendix that does nothing useful, but is prone to infection with deadly consequences. Left to take its own cruel course, natural selection might have gotten around to solving these matters in another million years.

But we don't live under the law of the

jungle anymore. Civilization has created its own standards of fitness. An oriental potentate with hemophilia or a susceptibility to cancer may have two hundred children, all bearing the same harmful gene and all in a position to pass it on to their own numerous children.

The process by which an individual succeeds according to the standards of his society and so is able to pass on his genetic characteristics may be called "social selection." There are three ways it can disrupt natural selection and work to the detriment of the species.

First, traits that are harmless in one individual may be dangerous if everybody shares them. Example: the competitiveness that western civilization puts such a premium on. It's possible that a thousand years of equating fitness with success in free enterprise, of trying to grab more worldly goods than one's neighbors, is what has made us so cantankerous. The children of a successful hard-driving businessman are probably born with a higher-than-average share of this urge. If easy-going unsuccessful types have fewer children (this is unclear), our society must be drifting in the direction of ever greater selfishness and avarice. And it's happening just when rising population pressure makes such qualities increasingly intolerable.

Second, social selection may pick out harmful traits and propagate them. The most often quoted example (like the previous one, unproved) is that welfare encourages lazy, dependent persons to have large families who grow up in turn to swell welfare rolls.

Third, while reinforcing irrelevant traits social selection may tend to drive out others that would be highly beneficial. Example: anyone who survives a bout of smallpox is left with a face marred by unsightly pitted scars. Yet such a person is likely to have a natural resist-

ance, inheritable by his children. Before Pasteur invented vaccination and virtually wiped out the disease, this was an invaluable survival characteristic. But a pitted face, far from being recognized as the hallmark of a desirable trait, was a barrier to marriage and child raising.

Clearly, social selection is not always adaptive. It may make the species less fitted to survive in existing conditions, not more. This raises again the question of how Man is supposed to live, of how well adapted we and our world are to one another.

In explaining the ills besetting human life the conventional line is to blame the evils of society. The optimist preaches Utopia: mend society's defects and all our individual troubles will vanish like mist in the morning sun. The pessimist preaches "civilization as pathology." Civilization is corrupt, he says; go back to nature and you eliminate the cause of the problems. Worst of all is the realist. He shrugs off the issue, saying, "Society can't be that bad. After all, it's done okay by me."

Blaming social strife on society is a little like blaming a sports car hitched to a mule team for not handling well. Most of what we are is determined culturally, not genetically. Thus a shoe salesman in New York has more in common with a shoe salesman in Accra than either has with his own ancestors of two hundred years ago. When human nature runs counter to social patterns, then, it really makes sense to say the fault lies with the former. We are unsuited to our institutions, not the other way around. It's just a way of saying that biological evolution doesn't work fast enough to keep up with cultural evolution.

Suppose there were an all-out national (or better, international) effort to build a better version of *Homo sapiens*. Imagine something like Kennedy's pro-

gram to put a man on the moon before 1970, only bigger. Neglecting for the time being how this could be accomplished, what would we try to do?

Well, given a chance, physicians would design a better body for us, free from back problems, appendicitis and the like. That would be nice, of course, but it wouldn't end war, pollution or overpopulation. To do this would demand but it wouldn't end war, pollution or overpopulation. To do this would demand improvements in our fundamental drives, a field of study where sociologists and psychologists are only beginning to gain some understanding. Here, by way of illustration, is a very incomplete list of examples.

The obvious first thing to do is cut down our aggressive instincts. Violent behavior between individuals of the same species serves a number of useful purposes, like enforcing territoriality in breeding grounds and picking out the strongest male in a herd. In most animals it stops short of murder, though, which is desirable from the standpoint of both the losers and the species. Naked and unarmed, Man was able to live with his natural level of aggression. Then he began using tools and weapons. It became much too easy for an enraged individual to kill the one who provoked his rage.

Furthermore, a level of aggression suitable for handling emergencies involving saber-tooth tigers is too high for domestic quarrels and big-power politics. While civilization has its softening effects, social selection encourages competition. Hence Man's aggressive drive has not dropped below its primitive level and may even have risen.

A second equally obvious thing to do is to curb the human reproductive rate. A normal woman has in her lifetime about four hundred chances to get pregnant, and her mate makes good on about

one percent of these. In unusually fecund couples the conception rate can rise to perhaps five percent. The average throughout human history lies somewhere between these two numbers. Until the industrial revolution, this was only a smidgeon more than the level necessary to balance the death rate. But scientific medicine is so far superior to acupuncture, faith healing, sympathetic magic, and other forms of witch doctoring that now the death rate has dropped to a fraction of its former value. The birth rate has fallen off little or not at all. Result—the population bomb.

ci To meet the threat of worldwide overpopulation, experts call for the universal practice of effective contraception. They might be right, if there is enough time to change the behavior patterns of two billion people. But if they could somehow find a way to lower the natural human reproductive drive, that would serve just as well. And if people grew up naturally with suitably reduced drives, that would be even better. Suppose, for example, that women were fertile twice a year instead of once a month. That would be a little less than necessary to balance the death rate, if the rate of conception stayed at its present value. World population totals would gradually fall until (or unless) people wanted more babies strongly enough to raise the conception rate.

Here's another example. Suppose you knew or could easily find out what any other person on the planet thought about any subject whatever. Suppose you could do this as easily as if he were face to face with you, and suppose nobody suffered any shame or fears over loss of privacy, or resentment at learning what others really think.

Never mind (for the moment) that all this goes against human nature. Assume some kind of telepathic or sensory link

connecting all the separate little islands of the human main. This bond would have the effect of wiping out conflicts and competition, failures to understand foreigners and strangers, distrust and language barriers. The race would resemble a single organism, unable to let one of its parts harm another.

Numerous sf stories have drummed the point home. Perhaps Fred Hoyle did it most convincingly. He described the alien intelligence in *The Black Cloud* as being linked up in precisely this way. The Cloud was astonished to learn that the parts of the human "organism" don't cooperate this closely. We, on the other hand, find the Cloud's tight-knit organization wholly baffling.

But maybe we would benefit from having this kind of mutual bond in a less extreme form. Men would get along better with one another if they were naturally more open, more trusting. They would get along better if they were constitutionally unable to ignore each other's feelings. Such a heightening of sympathy and sensitivity would be a decided advantage for life under crowded conditions.

Nobody wants to do more than his share of dirty work. And nobody can be sure that his comrades will pitch in if he volunteers to undertake an unpleasant task. We need to be organized to work for the general welfare. "What would happen if everybody did that?" teachers and parents from time immemorial have asked unruly children. In *Catch-22*, Yossarian replied, "I'd certainly be a damn fool if I acted differently." Yossarian is right. The world would be a better place if everyone behaved out of Christian charity. But if a lone person, realizing this, acts that way, the others take advantage of him. No amount of moral training can eradicate the causes of this. But if our native sense of community were

stronger, individuals would not fail to act for the common good for fear of making fools or dupes of themselves. This would be one attractive consequence of increasing our "togetherness" drive.

Somewhat akin to this is the subject of group loyalty, which encourages an individual to divide people up into "us" and "them." It's what makes both team sports and wars possible, so it has wholesome and destructive sides.

In their primeval "natural" habitat, men probably dwelt for protection and mutual gain in clan-sized groups of up to ten or twelve members. Our instincts, tuned by a million years of evolution, regard this number as right for cooperation. It's the right size for a family, a dinner party, a boys' club, or an effective committee. A group of fewer persons, say two or three, squabble or get bored with each other. The "cabin fever" of Arctic explorers comes about this way.

Larger groups, on the other hand, tend to split up into cliques. The members don't get to know each other. They may still be united in a common goal, but the feeling of closeness is gone. This is not to say that group loyalty is weaker. During World Wars I and II, anything American was—for Americans—good, and anything German or Japanese was bad. The single label of nationality was an excuse to set up "us" and "them" groups millions strong.

This is the malignant aspect of group loyalty. We associate ourselves with, or dissociate from, others for the most trifling reasons. Loyalty to the group distorts our sense of priorities. For example, at the height of the 1970 Pakistan floods in which half a million persons perished, a domestic plane crash killing thirty persons won the biggest headlines in most U.S. newspapers. And many Americans would sooner see everyone else in the world dead than stomach a military defeat.

We carry over from our primitive ancestors' family life the ability to cooperate in groups, even groups very different in size from the original ones. Our institutions are to a great extent founded on this trait. Eliminating it would rule out any form of society. There are two ways, however, in which tampering with it might make us better adapted for survival.

One would be to instill in us a sense of racial loyalty stronger than any group loyalty. Then we would be unable to hate or despise the "other side." The second way would be to somehow make it impossible for us to be for or against people we hadn't actually met. We wouldn't be able to kill Vietnamese because they come from the wrong side of a line on a map or have brown skin, nor die for complete strangers just because they are our "fellow Americans." We just wouldn't care.

Here's a final example of how Man's instincts might be reworked. We might have a heightened inborn fastidiousness about our waste products and about messing up the places we live in. We're like Kipling's bandar-log, the monkey people. We're happy to just toss our trash in the nearest river or leave it strewn by the roadside. If we were instinctively cleaner, we would find it easier to cope with the pollution problems industrial technology brings.

But enough of this far-out speculation. "You can't change human nature!" Everybody knows that. What's the use of talking about it?

Simply this. In a few decades it *will* be possible to change human nature. Scientists will understand how to alter gene chemistry to make new types. They will do this first with simple one-celled plants and then with laboratory animals. But since all organisms that reproduce sexually start from a single fertilized cell, it's a very short step from genetically

tailored fruit flies to laboratory-created supermen.

The resulting mutations, if that's the word, will not be human, by definition. They will have to be able to reproduce, either sexually or by growing copies of themselves in test tubes. The first method is preferable, having been proved over a long period of time. It has an additional big plus.

Homo superior or *Homo novus* or whatever he's called would be able to interbreed with *Homo sapiens*. The new, socially adaptive genes of the former would be engineered as dominants. That is, the offspring of a mixed mating would show the improvements in three cases out of four. Freed from the dead weight of hang-ups left over from our cavemen ancestors, the new breed would thrive. Social selection would favor the spread of the new traits through the entire genetic pool. New Man would show no distinguishing sign of alienness, no focus for prejudice or xenophobia, since all of the modifications could be kept within the extremes of existing human behavior. He would merely be very well adjusted.

Writer Vernor Vinge has long touted the prospect of human genetic engineering. He points out that it is the logical extrapolation of present trends in molecular biology. Usually it is regarded with apprehension or even loathing. But Vinge argues that it may be a force for good.

It may even be the salvation of our

species. Suppose that fifty years from now an unspecified catastrophe befalls us. It wipes out governments, economies, communications, everything. All but a relatively few people die. Suppose one percent of the present world population, forty million people, are left. They'll start over. They'll organize labor unions and governments, rebuild, and in a few centuries civilization will be back at twentieth century levels. Then another avalanche of problems looms over them and one day, bang! These cycles could go on repeating, as in Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, or one of these disasters might leave no survivors.

But suppose we succeed in creating even a few genetically dominant individuals with socially adaptive instincts. Imagine that they have low aggression levels, strong racial loyalty, high sensitivity to others' needs, instinctive cleanliness (but *not* low reproductive rates; that would be counter-productive). Then in the period of rebuilding, the new strain would largely replace unruly, quarrelsome *Homo sapiens*. On the next cycle, affairs would go much more smoothly. And finally . . . no more Armageddons.

Maybe genetic engineering will be perfected in time to bring human nature up to date, maybe not. Biological evolution has gotten way behind the times.

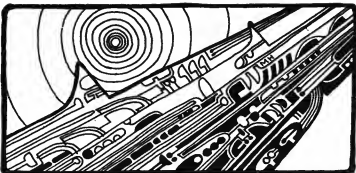
See you on the beach.

—DAVID L. BOOK

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the Future in Books



The Firesign Theatre: I THINK WE'RE ALL BOZOS ON THIS BUS. Columbia Records C 30737, 1971. Lp album, \$4.98.

"The five lifestyles of man in the future are, starting from top to bottom, though it's circular: First, the Berserker. Clue to a Berserker: Anybody who's got a gun. Anybody in a lime-green car with eight-foot tires, called Demon or Barracuda. Any Army officer, anybody in uniform. . . . There's a Berserker aspect to all of us. You can play softball with a Berserker. A Berserker doesn't always have to kill, but in the back of his mind it's not a bad idea.

"Under the Berserkers are the Zips. The archetypal Zip is the 1930s guy with the thin moustache. Zips have always been concerned with hair. . . . There's a Zip in everyone's kip, is the World War One English expression. Zips love new products . . .

"Bozo is the Brotherhood of Zips and Others. Bozos are people who band together for fun and profit. They have no jobs. Anybody who goes on a tour is a Bozo. Why does a Bozo cross the street? Because there's a Bozo on the other side. It comes from the phrase *vos otros*, meaning others.

"They're the huge, fat, middle waist. The archetype is an Irish drunk clown with red hair and nose and pale skin. Fields, William Bendix. Everybody tends to drift toward Bozoness . . . They mean well. They're straight looking except

they've got inflatable shoes. They like their comforts. The Bozos have learned to enjoy their free time, which is all the time.

"Now the Boogies . . . They take it easy. They don't zip. They're not Bozos because they don't clone. They boogie around rather than hanging around one another. The Boogie.

"The other class is the Beaners. . . ."

—Firesign Theatre member
in *Rolling Stone* interview

Like the story-lines in their albums, the above description of "the five lifestyles of man in the future" exists as much between the lines as in them. Take those Bozos, for instance: unlike the Boogies, they "clone." How is that word intended? As a literal description—all Bozos fathered by the same cell? Metaphorically, because Bozos look alike, act alike, and tend to stick together? Or as a pun on "clown," which they so closely resemble? Or—more likely—a hazily defined combination of all three?

In the same interview they state, "The thing that delights us most is finding a metaphor which people can read in as many different ways as possible. . . . We retreat from things that are too specific and think, 'How can this be implied, generalized?' And in the implication we get a newer reality."

A newer reality.

This is the intersection between the

Firesign Theatre and sf: The search for a metaphor which leads to the recasting of the metaphor as a newer reality in and of itself.

In four phonograph albums, released over a period of four years (an album a year), the Firesign Theatre has been creating a new artform. Ostensibly "hip" comedy records, these albums are more surreal than comedic, although they are laced with humor. "We have more in common with surrealists than satirists," one of the four members of the group says. Building on the base of radio drama—voices, sound-effects, a cast of four with the talent to create as many different and diverse voices as are needed—the Firesign Theatre are creating something new, in a unique new medium. "People have difficulty believing that [what we do] is art. We feel that we're involved in the development of a completely new art form for the spoken word."

It is by no accident that this artform has evolved on the phonograph record. The Firesign Theatre began as an improvisational radio group on one of the hipper west coast FM stations, but their work is far too dense to be completely appreciated on a single hearing; had they remained solely radio players they would have been stunted by the inability of their audience to rehear and go more deeply into their work. But a modern lp record not only gives them enough time to develop a theme (up to an hour; more often forty minutes), but can be replayed as often as one likes.

Comedy records are notoriously short-lived in their impact; who today still listens to his copy of *The First Family*—that smash hit of 1962? Who, indeed, listened to it more than twice? The Firesign Theatre's records, on the other hand, reward repeated listening—indeed, they demand it.

It is impossible to adequately describe one of their records to someone who has never heard them, and I shan't try. But I can attempt to describe why I think their records demand your attention, as science fiction readers, and why I believe that *Bozos* deserves the strongest consideration for a Hugo this year. (Last year their previous record, *Don't Crush That Dwarf* . . . , was nominated; the award in that category—Drama—went to No Award, unfortunately.)

The sf author who comes closest to what the Firesign Theatre are doing—and he by no means duplicates their efforts—is Philip K. Dick, most especially in his *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*. In that novel you'll recall, reality becomes so plastic that, after the first third of the book, it is impossible to tell whether objective reality in any way matches up with the subjective reality experienced by the protagonists, each of whom has entered and cannot escape from the fantasy world of Palmer Eldritch. Indeed, the line between objective and subjective reality has disappeared, due to Eldritch.

Bozos starts deceptively simply, with the arrival of a tour bus at the local street corner (what local street corner? where? when?). It advertises itself as a tour bus to the future, and the apparent viewpoint character, Clem, decides impulsively to board it. What follows seems at first a straight-forward satirical tour of an Expo of the future, cyberneticized, hologramized, and neatly extrapolated from Disneyland and the marvels of recent World's Fairs. But in a Firesign Theatre story-line nothing is simple; nothing is straightforward. At first one admires the little details, like inflatable shoes, and laughs at the pun-filled explanation of our planet's origins (as purveyed by the tour). But gradually it becomes obvious that Clem is not who he seems to be—that

he is at once the author of this future and its victim.

His seat companion on the bus, Barney, appears at first a simple, laughable Bozo ("Go on—squeeze the wheeze; everyone loves to!") whose observation, "I think we're *all* Bozos on this bus," is taken for the album's title. (Clem: "My mother was a Bozoette...") But this future is Barney's future—it was created *for* him, as a grim warning of what a mindless place a Bozo's future might really be (and there's a hint that it has already begun with the election of our present President).

Repeated listenings will bring out many of the background details—conversations overlap, just as in "real life"—which offer subtle supportive evidence that indeed this future is as insanely hallucinatory as was Palmer Eldritch's, and as the story begins to draw to a close we penetrate layer upon layer of reality, each making us aware of a new perspective, adding a newer, larger "frame" to the story itself, until finally we become aware that Clem is his own nemesis, the cybernetic "Doctor Memory," that he is in fact a fake gypsy fortune-teller, giving a reading to Barney in a wagon somewhere (where? when?)—the entire record only (after all) a transient fantasy which will be replaced by yet another for the next paying customer, whose fantasy begins as the album ends.

Heavy stuff, this, for a "comedy record." Particularly strong is the second side of the album, in which Clem first begins ripping at the fabric of the future fantasy he has created in his attempt to find his way out. His conversations with the various hologrammatic linkages to Doctor Memory have a frightening reality of their own as the cybernetic "Doctor" begins breaking down in an attempt to avoid the confrontation that will end the fantasy. "The Doctor is happy/unhappy," a fragmented voice intones, and one is trapped within the Doctor's dilemma.

But is this science fiction?

"We've tried to write a science fiction piece, but never considered that we'd succeeded," Firesign Theatre claims. The question is still open. Decide for yourself.

—TED WHITE

D.G. Compton: *CHRONOCULES*. Ace Books # 10480, 1970. 255 pages, 75¢

Editor's note: in the two reviews which follow, opposing viewpoints are expressed.

It seems to me that science fiction, like any other art-form or endeavor, takes an inordinately long time to pass through a phase. Some years ago, a science fiction story which was relentlessly pessimistic and bitingly critical of science and our culture in general was rare. Now, such stories are staples of the science fiction diet. The wholesale discovery by science fiction's readers, writers, and editors of our collective conscience is a good thing. There is much in the world to be upset about.

The large amount of self-critical writing in science fiction does not disturb me, but the nature of much of this writing does upset me. There appear to be a group of writers who feel that to preach the same message repeatedly is the one proper role for science fiction. This attitude is, I believe, a fallacy. If it were not for the underground newspapers, films, poems, rock songs, novels, and other artistic and communicative devices telling us continuously that the world is bad and/or crumbling, then I might be happy to see science fiction writers work the pessimistic lode to death. As it is, I do not foresee the appearance of worthy successors to 1984 or *Brave New World* in this period of faddish and compulsive self-flagellations.

A case very specifically in point is David G. Compton's fourth Ace Science Fiction Special novel, *Chronicles*. It is easy to see why Terry Carr and Ace Books

have chosen to publish four of Compton's stories. They are well-written, well-thought-out, and they fit into the fashionable category of despairing pessimism.

Chronicles deals with a scientific research institution, and with the people who inhabit it. Without exception, these people are flawed almost to the point of readers' boredom. If swashbuckling heroes without feelings of weaknesses are signs of science fiction's immaturity; then so are selfish, childish, narrow-minded, and worst of all, *predictable* scientists, technicians, and politicians. Despite their lack of redeeming traits, Compton's characters are outlined with more skill than is common in science fiction novels. It is also clear from reading *Chronicles* that Compton is well-read and an accomplished craftsman.

My problem with the book lies in its function. Like Compton's other three Ace Science Fiction Specials, *Chronicles* seems to have been written solely in order to make its readers aware of the dangers inherent in scientific research. In doing this, the novel assumes an aura of preachiness. It uses the fictional format to stir its readers to a new awareness of danger. Though I am not at all opposed to using fiction to awaken readers to something present in their environment, I cannot condone Compton's particular handling of this technique. For one thing, his readers are almost certainly aware of the facts and the possibilities which he states. Indeed, they are almost numb to the very thought of them through sheer overexposure.

Chronicles has much to recommend it in its parts, but for me it loses its intended effect by being totally and cloyingly unoriginal in its preachy intent. The scientific "wild surmise" which provides the science-fiction aspects of the story is interesting. So is the narrative form of the novel and so are such important

aspects of story-telling as characterization and language texture. Nevertheless, Compton fails because he does not write the kind of story he has obviously intended to write. His intent is not entertainment pure, for his story is too closely focused and contemporary for that. His intent is not pure intellectual stimulation and speculative play, for his novel has but one major bit of intellectual ingenuity in it—and that is purposefully underplayed. The intent, it seems obvious, is to scare us. This is a noble aim in theory, but Compton does not pull it off in *Chronicles*.

In writing a scare novel of the near future, Compton and his many fellow-writers who continue to apply themselves to this task should try not merely to inform us all once again that things are going wrong. Even to catalogue a few new ways in which doom may befall us is not interesting beyond a point. What the scare genre needs is a few new ideas about its own function. Merely frightening readers is useless. Perhaps we should be told *why* things are bad, or given suggestions about how to make things better. As it is, Compton's story can produce only despair and hopelessness, or at least recommend these attitudes. However horrible the evils may be that Compton has chosen to write against at such length, they should not defeat us all. I hope that Compton and others will begin to figure out where we should go from here.

—STEPHEN ALLEN WHEALTON

D.G. Compton knows the proper use of "style." He doesn't shout "look what I can do" with some mind-dazzling imagery, like a Zelazny or Delany; or try to mystify and confuse with Deep Pronouncements and utter abstractions, like a Ballard or Disch. Instead, he uses it to create some of the most "real" human characters that science fiction has ever

seen. Other writers seem as if "they're trying too hard"—Compton flows along naturally, leisurely, with never a hurried moment, never, it seems, with a strained, too-exuberant word. He has a richness and solidity that few writers possess. I could go on, but I doubt if any words of mine could explain Compton's stylistic beauty better than an excerpt from the novel itself:

"... a ramified family of rooks, just settled in for the night in the high elms around the saw-mill, rose angrily at the sound and abused still further the ivy'd tranquility. Roses looked up at them, his only audience, and waved his arms disjointedly. Then he stopped waving, and watching instead their steep circles against the sky. When he did not remind himself that they were birds he could see them as vast black sailing ships, tacking far far above him. After a while their noise made them birds again, and he continued, disappointed, down the path to the jetty."

And yet Compton's power takes some time before you *really* begin to feel its effect; to fully understand it, you'll have to emerge yourself in the actual book.

There's also a heavy, English flavor to *Chronocules* that lingers long after you've set down the volume, and some slight, dry humor that adds variety to the novel. For example, this is one of the characters talking to his wife, who is picking at her food:

"Has no one told you, woman, that poison is usually invisible?" He himself had, three times a day, since before they were married. "You can shove your food around all day and you'll never spot it."

"You know it's not that, Emmanuel. You know I'm looking for gristle. You know I can't stand gristle."

"Gristle? The most neutral of substances? You'll eat blood? You'll eat

muscle? You'll eat blood that's been pumped around and through that poor animal's heart? You'll eat muscle that's helped it to walk and run and reproduce itself? You'll eat all that and you won't eat gristle?"

"Margot pushed her plate away. 'I think I shall become a vegetarian,' she said.

"Since this was her usual reply, made on an average of twice a day, it irritated her husband still further."

Besides showing some of the dry humor present in the book, this quote demonstrates Compton's fine gift for characterization. The "husband" in this situation is Manning Littlejohn, an arrogant, domineering old fellow, who "always had time to correct other people's bad habits," as the author puts it. He demands perfection (or so it seems) of everyone in Penheniot Village but himself.

Penheniot Village, in case you're wondering, is an experimental research center set up by Manning in order to discover time travel. Through time travel Manning hopes to escape death and the deterioration of the environment around him. All Penheniot's research laboratories and buildings are disguised behind the framework of old cottages, barns, etc., and while they look perfectly natural in their settings, the village's purpose is a secret to no one—locals and tourists alike. Security is tight, and the people in the village are forbidden to mix with those outside. And it is against this backdrop that the novel unfolds . . .

Roses Varco, a thirty-eight year old moron, is the novel's main character. He has lived in the Village since before it was a scientific installation surrounded with fences and radar nets. Liza Simmons—for reasons she herself cannot fathom—wants simple-minded Roses, even though the people around her look down upon him as the "village idiot."

Middle-aged, masturbating David Silberstein, Operations Supervisor of the Village, is drawn into the conflict between them, since he desires Liza, but is afraid/unable to put his desire into words. Each of these characters is finely detailed, and there are numerous minor players scattered through-out the book that come alive under Compton's skillful pen as well. *Chronocules* is an assortment of fascinating, incredibly detailed people, and it is upon these strengths that the novel rests.

But in other areas—mainly the science fictional aspects—*Chronocules* fails. It is reminiscent of some of John Wyndham's later, more mainstream-inclined novels: the science fiction in it is really just frosting on the cake. It plays no vital role in the novel, and has barely any influence on the actions of the characters. And time travel seems rather tame stuff for a writer of Compton's ability to play around with—especially after writing a novel like *Synthajoy*.

Yet the main science fictional complaint that can be brought against *Chronocules* concerns internal logic more than it does subject matter. In the prolog the author supposedly relates how he came across a mysterious, indestructable book which arrived "explosively" in the kitchen of 18-year-old Roses Varco. The

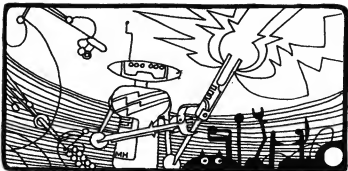
author claims to have "translated" this book into novel form. This creates a paradox, since in the main body of the novel Compton states that it is "philosophically impossible" to travel backwards in time, or for two versions of the same person/thing to exist at once. Yet, then how can this mysterious book—which forms the main portion of *Chronocules*—arrive, containing the story of all these "future" events? The author attempts to rationalize this paradox by saying "One can only assume that its remarkable indestructibility was proof against those [philosophical] forces." In other words, the philosophical impossibility meets the indestructible book (what next?). In any event, the novel's prolog and epilog are merely "extras," tacked on to the main body of the novel, which Richard Geis aptly calls "the meat and bones of human relationships." The flaw is nagging, but it does not seriously affect the flow of the main portion of the book—and I seriously wonder why a prolog and epilog were even included. The main narrative is complete in itself.

Chronocules is not good, original "science fiction," but it is good reading—and far above most of the current crop. Read it, and be surprised; D.G. Compton has been too long neglected by most sf readers. —CY CHAUVIN

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...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to: Or So You Say, P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

A STOP-PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

This column is the last item to be prepared for this issue, and thus affords me the opportunity to announce a last-minute change in our plans for the next (May) issue.

Bob Shaw has just sent us "Other Days, Other Eyes," his long-awaited "slow glass" novel!

In 1966, after some time away from science fiction, Bob burst back upon the scene with the now-classic "Light of Other Days," his first story about "slow glass." That story came within *one vote* of the Nebula Award that year, and within eight votes of a Hugo. He followed it up with "Burden of Proof," which appeared the next year, and then let the whole idea of "slow glass" simmer in the back of his mind while he wrote a number of other stories and a series of novels ("Night Walk," "The Two-Timers," "One Million Tomorrows," etc.) around other ideas. Now he's written a third short story, "A Dome of Many-Colored Glass," and a complete novel as well around that most fascinating of concepts, "slow glass"—glass which transmits light impossibly

slowly, taking up to many years in some cases.

Because of the importance of this novel, we've scrapped our planned schedule and we're serializing it immediately—beginning next issue! (Greg Benford's "Jupiter Project"—and Don Davis' two superb covers—will follow directly after, beginning with our September issue.)

And next month—in the April issue of our sister magazine, FANTASTIC—look for "A Dome of Many-Colored Glass," a foretaste of what to expect in just two short months in these pages!

Dear Mr. White:

Although I never knew John Campbell, and I was born long after his fine stories were written, I have always admired him as a very talented man much responsible for the format of the science fiction I enjoy today. How fortunate I was to have seen him honored at the Lunacon this year! 1971 will surely go down as a grim year in many circles: in the music world we lost Stravinsky and Armstrong, in humorous writing, Cerf—and here, Campbell.

After reading your and Mr. Moskowitz's remarks, the lines came, Let twilight be a made-up word
The product of men's minds,
The dusky calm beneath a starry herd

Of suns, where the spring of time un-
winds—
Where crouch in ruins men and metal
men—
Or silent, still-waiting machines
For some pioneer to blaze forth his light
again—
In dark blue air afloat on unparallelled
dreams
Of things unknown, asleep, not yet un-
covered,
Mused in the future that the past redeems
Locked in the rough, dusty leaf—sights
wild and beloved
All yet to thunder free in the high-bond
page,
That glimpse of shadows, and the light
to solve their caverns' mystery!
What twilight falls now or in some secret
age
Kindled by this light (before all-final
night) shall reignite dark fuels of living
history;
Imagination of all conquers worlds that
one man found
And holds onto shadows of a distant
magic-ground,
For twilight to mankind is at what a man
beholds and stares
—And who says every eye that sees is
theirs?

The last page of Campbell's book is
now completed for science fiction heri-
tage, but it will be a long time until he
is remembered merely as words glimpsed
between the bright covers of a genre.

Sincerely yours,
HILARY WITKIN
New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. White,

Re the comments about Dr. Wertham
in your March issue. What exactly could
he do to the sf field, if he is preparing
to launch himself into a one-man war
against us? (By "us" I mean fandom, and
science fiction in general.) You see, he

and his actions against comics were a little
before my time (I'm teenaged now) so
about the only information I have about
him is in your editorial in the July '70
issue of AMAZING, though even from that
it was evident he caused quite a ruckus.
All this, as you speculated, probably re-
sulted from the goings-on that took place
during the McCarthy Era. I believe you
may have jumped conclusions somewhat
(I hope so!) though in the face of new
evidence, I'm not so sure.

I'll pose this question to you and AMAZ-
ING's readers: What are this fella's
motives? Did he really think that comics
perverted their readers (who were—are for
the most part, children), instantly con-
verting them into delinquents? (Perhaps
nowadays he thinks science fiction leads
to such things, eh?) I wonder if the Good
Doktor ever considered attacking the crap
on prime time (which is mostly mindless
situation-comedies) as giving kids a dis-
torted view of life?

Back to what I said before, about the
sort of thing he could do to us. If, indeed
he is planning to assault science fiction
the way he assaulted comics, what could
he do to hurt us, besides discrediting us?
I, for one, doubt if he could do much
of anything, though I'd rather not have
him (and his followers, the fabled "Silent
Majority," perhaps the John Birch Soci-
ety, or DAR) breathing down our necks.
As for *Seduction of the Innocent* I've never
been interested enough to read it (nor
have I ever seen a copy, but I'll look).

As you know, there are two (perhaps
more) alternatives for the digest-
magazine's format; one is the paperback
size, which has been discussed extensively
before. The other is the large-size format,
namely 8½ x 11 inches, known as the
bed-sheet size.

I don't know if this would help sales
very much, but you must admit that a
digest magazine is a small object on a

newsstand rack. The large-size, while being attractive visually, can stand out well on a shelf full of magazines competing for the customer's attention (can you imagine a Jeff Jones cover that size?). I wouldn't know if this would bring your publications to the attention of people who may have overlooked them in the past, but let me tell you something: the newsstand where I buy my sf magazines keeps them tucked away in an obscure corner of the shop. The tourist (I think David Williams said something like this in *SFR*) passing through, looking for some reading matter, might well miss them, while a larger magazine would be easily visible. I'm not sure if this or similar situations exist in other places, but I'd be willing to wager it does.

I don't know if this is too costly or too much bother, as I am strictly a layman in this field. *Analog* did go to this size in '63; then Campbell discontinued it in '65, turning digest again. This was an attempt to make an sf magazine one supported by various advertisers rather than supported by the readership . . . it was a good idea, but it failed. As to whether you could do this, I don't know. *Analog* was supported by a large publisher, (unlike *AMAZING & FANTASTIC*) and still had troubles. Have things changed sufficiently in six years to try this again?

DOUG ROBILLARD
230 Gulf St.
Milford, Conn., 06460

The statement in The Twentieth Century Fund Newsletter had the Good Doktor working on a "a monograph" which will "attempt to draw conclusions . . . about an important segment of the country's adolescent population. The result of the study, Dr. Wertham believes, can have a bearing on adolescent psychology, education, stu-

dent unrest, sexual mores of youth, freedom of expression, obscenity, violence, political attitudes of youth, juvenile drug addiction, and the economics of amateur publishing." All this from fanzines. What actual effect the "monograph" will have is moot; the notion of a man of Wertham's biases attempting to deal with the above topics via an imperfect reading of science fiction fandom's amateur publications, however, is rather chilling to contemplate. The Good Doktor did attack television, in the late fifties, in an apparent attempt to gain the same sort of best-selling notoriety which his smear of comics produced half a decade earlier. Comics are one of the bottom rungs of the social ladder in publishing, but television commands a superior position. A few shots were fired in TV Guide, but Wertham lost the initial skirmish and retired from the field of battle. I'm not opposed to experimenting with the "bedsheet" size, but apparently most distributors are. Newsdealers like to stock all magazines of a type together, in the theory that people who want a particular type of magazine don't want to hunt for various titles all over the stand. When any magazine sets out to create a new niche on the newsstand, it faces problems. *Analog* did indeed try the larger size, in the early sixties (and once before, in the early 1940's), but sales were apparently not a direct factor, pro or con; the stated aim was to attract more full-page advertising from the advertisers who appear in such magazines as *Scientific American*, the photography magazines, etc. The attempt was unsuccessful. A more recent go at the larger size was the revived *Coven 13*, under the title *Witchcraft & Sorcery*, of which I saw only two issues, early in 1971. Apparently extremely bad distribution killed that attempt without giving the magazine a fair chance. The only copies I saw were displayed with the Creepy-type comic magazines, which is where I'm afraid we'd come up if we tried it.—TW

Dear Ted,

That was an excellent editorial in the September 1971 *AMAZING* debunking the methods and manners of both the pro and anti SST factions. Your evaluation of some of the arguments, however, leaves something to be desired.

At one point in the editorial you state that the proper time-table of SST vs. present carriers is "... three times as many passengers or freight-tons hauled by one plane in the same time period." Unless what you meant was—"in the same amount of flight time"—this is an obvious error. You have neglected to consider the "turn-around" time necessary to prepare a big plane for flight, loading time, and the often considerable stretches of time waiting for a spot on a take-off runway or stacked up in pattern waiting to land. If all this money is to be devoted to air travel more time could probably be cut by improved runway systems, development of better equipment for tracking planes in flight patterns, and easier access, to the airports themselves. (In some cities, notably Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and New York, it is virtually impossible to get from the center of town to the airport by public transportation.) And, while you're at it, the most aggravating delays are often waiting in slow lines and the very slow baggage retrieval services at most airports.

You also struck out on the SST's help for freight carriers. The first important factor here is cost, a modification of something like the 747 is going to be far cheaper than a modification of the present SSTs for the shipper; and development of a larger SST for freight is likely to cost almost as much as development of the present versions of the SST. And, flight time here is not crucial as any difference in flight times is trivial compared with the time for distribution from

airport to consumer. Oh yes, a small nit, one of the products you list would not be a better shipping commodity by SST: in the revised edition of *The James Beard Cookbook* it is written (page 367-8) of the iceberg lettuce that "This round, hard head-lettuce was developed by growers because it ships well and keeps well. It's an ideal product from the viewpoint of shipper and grocer . . ."

My own opposition to the SST is the cost to the consumer over and beyond development costs. Many airports would require extensive alterations (in Philadelphia they are estimated at \$150 million) to accommodate SSTs without improving the service to the consumer. In the long run, I feel it's more important that the schools don't close, that my streets are kept clean, and my highways are updated than a reduction in travel time to Europe.

YALE F. EDEIKEN
2635 Cranston Road
Philadelphia, Penna. 19131

In the long run, we're going to have faster air travel—to anywhere in the world. In the short run, agreed, we've got to upgrade our ground facilities. The airports underwent a great spasm of "modernization" in the late fifties, as the first passenger jets came in, but most are still geared more to a 1940's approach than anything meeting present-day needs.—TW

Dear Ted,

I have been reading, and writing, *sf* for only about three years now, and most of the reading I've done has only been from books because *I just haven't been able to find any sf magazines around here*. But, finally, I did get ahold of your January issue, and then your May issue. Both of which I enjoyed tremendously. I especially liked the covers on both (as a matter of fact, Jeff Jones' cover for the May issue

has given me a story idea). I was just reading *Or So You Say* in the September issue, and whoever said that your story, "Growing Up Fast In the City" was badly written, pornographic, and non-science fiction, will probably tell me that Bradbury has a ghost writer!

The September issue was equally well done. All the short stories were great, especially "Junk Patrol," and "Myrra." The later one certainly left you with something to think about.

PAUL BOND
838 Barhugh Place
San Pedro, Calif. 90731

Dear Mr. White,

The best thing in the latest (Sept.) AMAZING was your "Junk Patrol." Do I detect something familiar in the names Sam and Rose? It might be coincidence, of course, but the ending reminded me of the last page of *Lord of the Rings*, reinforcing my earlier suspicions. Then there is 'Jerome Podwill.' Is this a new game or something? There was a story in a recent *If* by Greg Benford and Donald Franson that also had a lot of familiar names in it.

The Conclusion of *The Second Trip* was as good as the first half, only I was hoping Hamlin would get his body back. Damn it, it was his. Silverberg is the best SF writer of his group (Anderson, Dickson, etc.), and ought to get the Hugo for *Tower of Glass* which is the best thing written in the past five years. (*Anything* but *Ringworld* would be bearable, in fact.)

I could happily live ever after if I never read another parallel-time story. Unfortunately they seem to be proliferating. Even *Dark Shadows* was doing it before it was cancelled. Shaw's at least was funny.

Benford's columns ought to be collected into a book for use as a handbook

by writers who lack a technical background. I don't demand exactitude in my SF, but I don't dislike it either. For sheer usefulness Benford's column is #1 of the science-fact articles. Whatever happened to Book?

I suppose I'll have to get a copy of *Day After Judgment* since you gave it such a good review, but it'll have to have a damn good explanation of how he violated the basic principle of ceremonial magic, that all control of the demons including the summoning is done through God. Like I said, I don't demand strict realism in my reading, but I do want consistency.

The new cover stock is great, no more wrinkled, smeared covers and ink-stained fingers. How do you print on it, tho? Or is it coated after?

JOHN LEAVITT
Maple Avenue
Newton, N.H. 038

There was certainly no connection in my mind between "Junk Patrol" and Lord of the Rings—before or after I wrote it. I use names from all over—friends, acquaintances, enemies, stories I've read, etc. Podwill comes from the respelling of the name of an artist whose work I've admired. Whatever happened to Book? He does the science column this issue, solo. (Both Benford and Book worked at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory in California until recently. Book is now working in nearby Washington, D.C., and Benford has moved to the University of California at Irvine, where he hopes to "do more teaching and less physics.") I think Blish deals with your objections quite satisfactorily in Day After Judgment—read it and tell me if you agree. As for our covers, they are printed by the same process used for paperback covers, our printer also being a paperback book printer.—TW

Dear Ted,

I think that you have done as much as possible with the packaging of AMAZING. The July issue is the best looking magazine I've even seen. The cover stock makes AMAZING look almost like an oversized paperback. For once the ink stays on the cover. The other item that makes that issue so noteworthy is the absence of staples. I think Bob Tucker will rejoice over that. I think you should get at least a mini-Hugo for the appearance of AMAZING.

For the last year or so Bob Silverberg has been writing a number of first class novels. I don't know how he can maintain such a high level of quality. Although "The Second Trip" was not the best, it certainly is a definite plus to AMAZING. I felt that my time spent reading it was well worth it. By the way, did you notice that in some respects it is a sequel to *The Demolished Man*? The characters and situations were different, but the idea of totally wiping clean a criminal's mind was the main idea in Bester's book. As I recall Bester left Ben Reich as his mind was being wiped clean. I'm not accusing anybody of plagiarism, just bring up an interesting idea to kick about.

Is C. V. Blaine for real? His letter in the July issue was mildly incensed, but the letter in the September issue was unbelievable. As to his claim that *Analog* is the only place left of true Sf all I can say is: prove it. The serials have been the only thing that keeps me reading the magazine. I find the entire atmosphere of the magazine rather stifling.

I've learned through *Locus* that John Cambell died. At his best he produced some of the best Sf ever written. Those golden age *Astoundings* are gold mines of stories.

Jumping over to the September issue I thought that "Myrra" was one of the better pieces in that issue. Maybe because

I'm partial to short-short stories. Your own "Junk Patrol" was an interesting slice of tomorrow. I enjoyed it. (I think it could also have been titled: "An Occurrence Above the Moon," but "Junk Patrol" is an interesting title.) It seems like every other Bob Shaw story I read is involved with some aspect of time or inter-dimensional travel. Shaw writes some good variations with time, but he has some work before him before he tops the two classics, both by Heinlein. I refer to "By His Bootstraps" and "All You Zombies." I wish Shaw luck.

Thank you for your thoughts on the SST debacle. Both sides were using so many red herrings in their arguments that they both began to stink. I'm totally confused about the entire thing. Neither side had put forth any substantive argument. As a result the public got screwed.

C. V. Blaine strikes again!!!!!! He does like to use CAPITALS!!!!!! and exclamation marks!!!!!! doesn't he???? I suggest that his FUGO!!!! AWARD!!!! be modeled after its creator. I think that only fair.

I wish there was more artwork inside. The artists you do use are very good, but I wish you would use them more often. I realize that you do have rather severe space limitations, but one can always wish.

Concerning your review of *Quark* 1, I really don't know if you're correct, but I did pick up *Quark* 2 and found it rather lackluster. As an original collection it falls way short of the *Orbit* series. Maybe the reason for the low quality is due to a possible lack of time on Delany's part. I've enjoyed virtually everything he has ever written and I think he probably took his time in writing. Maybe if he had more time to work on each issue of *Quark* it could have been a little better. Then maybe Delany is not the editor type. In any event I hope he returns to writing. *Quark* was a disappointment.

A minor quibble. With each reprint could you give the date when published? I know that many fans don't have the Day 1926-1950 & the MITSFS 1951- to date magazine indices. Maybe the date could be placed on the contents page.

Your cover paintings are great. Adkins' for September was real good. But what is that aura of blackness around the piece of junk and the spaceman?

I really don't know what you can do to further improve AMAZING & FANTASTIC. I guess that only until circulation improves will there be any consideration of making them monthly and increasing the pages.

MICHAEL WALSH
9111 McNair Drive
Alexandria, VA 22309

*According to what I've heard, time was not a problem in preparing the Quark series. However, it would appear that Delany's name was used more as a figurehead than anything else; his co-editor, Marilyn Hacker, is supposed to have done the bulk of the editing, and it seems likely others (unnamed) were also involved. We've arrived at the Final Solution to the reprint problem this issue, and I trust it will answer all criticisms. As for Adkins' cover, well . . . on the original painting the entire background is a solid black. Apparently it wasn't properly lit when the engraver shot it. *Sigh* . . . —TW*

Dear Mr. White,

I have just gotten through reading the November issue of AMAZING. I must compliment you on the covers of your magazine, they are excellent. Your magazine in this and other ways is getting better.

I enjoyed all the stories in this issue, but in "To End All Wars" by G. Eklund I fail to see how the thinking of the Kirkhamites is so very different from that

of Terrans.

The first "Letter to the Editor" is something else. I am almost tempted to compliment you for having written that letter from Mr. Shaver to interject some humour into the column. It's fantastic for its lack of touch with reality.

Mr. Shaver apparently wasn't reading the *Saturday Evening Post* before and during its skid from popularity. Its death was earned. The loss of quality during its last few years was dramatic and mercifully, for the readers, fatal.

I had always thought that our space program began during the Eisenhower administration in the last quarter of the fifties and 1960. That's not including the work done between the war and then with the V-2 and its immediate descendants.

I very much lament the cuts in the space program made under presidents Johnson and Nixon, but the nation which was and is caught up in an expensive and foolish war, is now turning, by popular demand, toward the at-home problems of poverty and pollution.

Speaking of pollution, I believe that it's caused by the normal desires of businessmen to make a profit and more-so by their enormous ignorance and that of the population in general of what they are actually doing to our planet. An insidious malevolence is hardly necessary.

And as for the gigantic spaceships and such in our American West and undoubtedly other places. Wow! I'd always thought that rivers, wind, volcanos, and the slowly drifting, colliding continents were responsible.

I am quite possibly directing the last portion of this letter to the wrong person but I'd sure hate to get on the Shaver's mailing list.

GARY L. ENGLER
AMV W/C
635 Bldg 490
Nas Miramar, Calif.

Dear Ted:

I read your answer to Shaver's letter with interest. However, tho I agree with you that Shaver's contentions are damned unlikely, the fact that you disagree with the meaning of these contentions "... we are innocent dupes of cosmic manipulators . . .", is not a valid reason for rejecting them. Argue on facts, not philosophy; otherwise you're just chasing your tail.

KENNETH SCHER

3119 Mott Ave.

Far Rockaway, N.Y., 11691

"Damned unlikely" about sums it up, I think. In philosophy as in science the Law of Occam's Razor holds true: the simplest explanation is the most likely. I refuse to buttress my rejection of a system of paranoid delusions with a point-by-point rebuttal; my time is too valuable to waste in such a pointless endeavor. —TW

Dear Ted:

I was heartened to read another AMAZING. It's the only prozine that can persuade me to shove aside piles of unanswered mail, unlaced zines and the incomplete stencils to my own nextish.

This may be a fuggheaded statement, but the more I read your editorials and articles in zines, the more I think of you as a fan, rather than a pro. Before someone claims I'm being insulting, let me clarify my point. There is a certain feel to your writing that distinguishes it from that of any other pro writing in the fan field. Unlike some fellow writers, you don't have to make the point over and over that you are a pro. In short, there is none of the loathsome egotism exuded by some of the lesser lights in prodom. I'm afraid that's a bit harsh, but it's true, at least in part. Further, your articles are written on an adult level. You don't act as if fandom consisted of a gaggle of pimply teenagers who are only good for

the dollars they can fork—or have their parents fork—over for that next really great N*O*V*E*L. In fact, if I've read you correctly, then fans are virtually, or should be, on equal terms with pros. Now, that's a mindblowing concept. It sounds like the opening shot in the Fen Liberation Front's battle with its own inferiority complex. I mean, even though I wouldn't feel hesitant to say hi to you or Bob Silverberg or Terry Carr at a convention, I'd still wonder about the others. I simply don't know how another author might react to my casual approach. Unlike you, I don't know what pros are lovers of fandom, and what pros are less than enthusiastic about their following. Of course, I'm not about to lose sleep over this, but it bothers me that a fan needs what amounts to a scorecard to tell the "good guys" from the not-so-good, at least in terms of their attitude toward fans and fandom.

On to more congenial topics . . . I thoroughly enjoyed Terry Carr's "In Man's Image." His protagonist was a bit more than the usual "vacuum cleaner." The last man was much more realistically portrayed than most end-of-human-civilization epics allow. Overall, his story merited that suspension of disbelief we hear so much about.

Unfortunately, though I usually find pleasure in the "social story," Gordon Eklund's "To End All Wars" bordered on the trivial. It sounds like he took the ludicrous Paris Peace Talks—complete with arguments over the arrangement of tables—added a thin covering of the Credibility Gap and called Spiro a Kirkhamite. Jesus. Present-day events make the story seem woefully outdated. Perhaps his aim was, in part, to satirize these proceedings. Well, I find that Nixon's Pacifism parodies itself quite nicely. If Eklund meant to make any heavy comments between the lines of his satire, well,

I'm afraid the cruel irony of dropping napalm on babies while Our Fearless Leader talks of self-determination and democracy for the people of Southeast Asia—even if we have to kill them to give it to them—is heavy enough. Perhaps, in 1967, this story would've been a poignant social commentary. Today, however, it's just a bland reiteration of the insanity we are forced to live under daily.

"Road Factory," on the other hand, was excellent. The changes that Conway Croner's head is forced to go through are convincing. I can relate to the character. The female alien even seems less stereotyped than most aliens—especially female—usually become.

One last note, right on to Cy Chauvin! His last sentence says, in a lot less words than I'm able, what makes AMAZING and FANTASTIC so interesting to me.

DAVID WM. HULVEY

Rt. 1, Box 198

Harrisonburg, Va. 22801

Well, David, I was a fan for ten years before I sold my first sf story, and in that time I was able to appreciate the web of

friendships which hold sf fandom together; it just wasn't—and isn't—something one can turn his back on in, perhaps, a misguided attempt to climb the social ladder from fandom to prodom—not unless friendships are less important than status. And a great many really fine people, like Wilson (Bob) Tucker and Larry T. Shaw, who were then major pros, went out of their way to befriend a teen-aged fan named Ted White, without condescension or any apparent awareness of the gulfs (status, age) which separated us. Good examples count for something. The myth that fans are a race apart from pros has been with us for a long time, but I think you'll find that it's never been more than a myth. People are people. Some of us like to read sf, some of us like to write it, and most of us enjoy discussing it. Prodom is a professional career; fandom is a hobby, an avocation. There is no dividing line between the two—one can quite easily involve himself in both. I do. I expect I always shall. Over the years I've been accused more than once of being "just a fan at heart." Despite the occasional malice in such utterances, I've always taken that as a compliment. —TW

(Continued from page 101).

"Thomas? Well, then get me Thomas!" He turned and looked back at the column. Relays clicked behind its glass and meters fluctuated on its metal panel.

"Thomas? I thought you said the banks in Sector Six weren't ready yet! Well, who activated Bank three hundred? Nobody? Listen, I'm standing here looking right at it and it's merrily working away!" He glanced at the clipboard. "Yes, I know it's the transceiver link with the Syncom satellite network. So, it doesn't show on your console. Well, if no one up there activated it, then get some people down here to check it. Right now!"

Keller slammed the receiver back in

its cradle. He looked again at the offending column. It was silent.

He walked over to it. No relays were moving. The meter needles were at zero.

"Aah!" Keller walked away, disgusted. He disappeared through the door, returning to his interrupted duties.

DAVID HOLMES HAD JUST dispatched three Carter's Cola trucks and was preparing to radio a fourth when the tones came out of his short wave set. He winced at the whine, then listened to the melody that followed.

Fifteen minutes later, he was walking into the bottling plant armed with eight packets of rat poison.

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(Continued from page 4)

largely-reprint policy was in effect, the response from fans and readers was favorable. However, as working sf writers began to complain about the reprints, and the Science Fiction Writers of America threatened (but never actually carried out) a boycott, the reprint policy fell under a cloud from which it never emerged.

The notion of a science fiction magazine in which all or most of the stories were reprinted is not new. The first such was *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, a magazine which enjoyed a generally favorable reputation and was published from 1939 to the mid-fifties by Popular Publications. In 1949, Pines Publications launched *Fantastic Story Quarterly* (later, *Fantastic Story Magazine*, when it became a bi-monthly) and a *Wonder Story Annual*, both primarily devoted to reprints. *FSM* was so popular that at one point it was rumored to be outselling the same publisher's new-story magazines, *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. (Pines is still issuing a reprint annual, *Science Fiction Yearbook*, the last remaining "pulp" in the field.) A certain amount of controversy surrounded these magazines, but, in a time when the field of sf magazines was much larger than it is today, one or two all-reprint publications not only found room but an obviously appreciative audience.

The problem with reprinted stories is that they *are* reprinted. From an author's point of view, every reprinted story is occupying space which might otherwise be filled with a *new* story, thus decreasing his potential market. Also, when a company already owns reprint rights to a story it is able to republish it without the author receiving another cent. Authors are usually opposed to reprints on general principle.

From the editor's point of view reprints

can be a blessing or a headache. Wading from the crumbling pages of old pulp magazines in order to search out a story worth reprinting can be an awful chore. I did it when I first began editing this magazine—and I gave it up after a few months. Writing standards have improved immeasurably in the last thirty years and a trek back through the moldering pages of this magazine's pulp days rubs one's nose in that fact. Also, unfortunately, the most memorable stories of yore were almost always novels or novellas—stories longer than we could comfortably reprint in the space we still devoted to reprints in 1969, much less in the last two years. (Both *FFM* and *FSM* devoted most of each issue to a novel, often filling in with only a couple of quite short stories.) Since it was not my desire to make *AMAZING STORIES* over into an exclusively reprint magazine, the best part of the job was beyond my reach.

For the readers, reprints appear to have been a mixed bag. I've seen studies which indicate that the average sf magazine reader will stay with a magazine only three to five years before losing interest in it, and according to such studies only a very small hard-core readership (say 5% or less) will remain loyal over a much longer period of time. For those of you who haven't been with us long a reprinted story should be as fresh as any, then—you never saw it before. But for every letter I receive from one of you who likes the reprints, I receive ten begging me to get rid of them. Obviously the question of whether or not you've seen the reprinted story before is less important than the actual quality of the story—and most of you don't think that much of most of our reprinted stories. They reflect a viewpoint and a style of writing which is apparently passé. In fact, I've received more votes in favor of the reprints from old-time readers—the hard core of loyalists—than

from newer readers. Nostalgia seems to be the key.

Until now the question of the reprints has not been mine to decide. From the moment I became editor of this magazine (three years ago—how fast time flies!) I have fought for more new stories. The original ratio was two-thirds reprints to one-third new stories. Almost immediately I was able to replace that with a 50-50 ratio (despite the canards published elsewhere by an old fox who found the grapes of editorship too sour), and, with our November, 1969 issue, with a policy of only one reprinted story ("the token reprint") per issue. That policy survived for two and a half years. Now the last reprint is gone.

Before rejoicing too quickly over the demise of that last "classic," let us pause and offer thanks for what the reprints did.

Put simply, they saved our magazines.

In 1964, this magazine was in the red. The world's first—and oldest—science fiction magazine was almost dead. It required massive surgery to survive—and then at first as a badly crippled invalid. But it did survive. Both magazines managed to pull through a tough half-decade that ended in a major business recession (and which brought about the death of two genuine colossi, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Look*, next to which we are puny to the point of insignificance), and throughout which prophets heralded the imminent end of all sf magazines.

We're still here. And we're looking better than ever.

I think that deserves a celebration. That's why this is our 46th Anniversary issue. We couldn't wait.

WE'VE GOT MORE to celebrate. I recently returned from a trip to New York City where Mike Hinge showed us five brand new cover paintings. These are paintings unlike any you've ever seen before—even

from Hinge. They are startling and revolutionary and so beautiful that if I could I'd hang them all on my livingroom walls. Mike had showed me preliminary sketches last year—back when we thought he'd take over our art direction, before his advertising work caught up with him. I knew then that these paintings would revolutionize sf magazine cover art—even the sketches were enormously exciting.

We've published two of Hinge's earlier paintings—on our November, 1970 and November, 1971 issues. (The interval between them was largely coincidental.) And we have another in the wings which we also bought from Mike some time back. Your letters have indicated the impact of these first two paintings—their use of design and color, of Hinge's vivid imagination—and they rank among the most popular we've ever published. Well, those are Mike's *old* paintings! Mike did those paintings *years* ago. In fact, he'd showed them to several other sf magazines—including this one, when Ziff-Davis was still publishing it! He was simply too far ahead of his time. His work didn't resemble the covers then being published, so he was politely but firmly shown to the door. Astonishingly enough, Mike Hinge had to wait *eleven years* before anyone in the sf field—his first love—would take a gamble on his work!

Once the dam burst, it was another story. Since he began appearing regularly in *AMAZING STORIES* and *FANTASTIC* he has been commissioned to do covers for Lancer Books, Berkley Books and Putnam. And, most recently, for *Time* magazine.

How's that again? *Time* magazine?

Mike Hinge—our Mike Hinge—had a cover "in opaque watercolor" on the October 4, 1971 issue of *Time*. There is a good possibility, he tells me, of more.

Naturally, we're bursting with pride for him. I consider Mike a good friend and

I've cheered his every success. I wept for him when the engraver made a botch of his first cover for us; I felt a paternal glow of satisfaction over the fine reproduction of his second. I've wished him the sort of luck he has long deserved in broadening out into the wider field of sf book illustration—and introduced him to the art director of a major publishing company when the opportunity came my way. Mike is too good to hog.

I have a subscription to *Time*, and the October 4 issue came in the mails with the same week's *Newsweek*, which I usually read first. I rarely spend much time looking at the cover on either magazine and it wasn't until I glanced over the contents page of that issue that bells began ringing in my head. "... by Mike Hinge," I read. *That's not a common name*, I thought. *I wonder if*... I turned back to the cover. There was no mistaking the script signature. And, once I began actually looking at the portrait of Emperor Hirohito, the style was quite obviously Mike's. Why hadn't I noticed it immediately? Because the cover of *Time* was the last place I ever expected to see the work of a "science fiction" artist?

"I wasn't sure they'd use it until the last minute," Mike told me later. "They get two different artists to do each cover, so they can choose the one they like best. Then there's always a chance they'll do a different cover altogether—like, if something newsworthy comes up at the last moment. I didn't find out until Saturday afternoon. They said to call up after 4:00 pm and they'd know." It was published and on the stands the following

Monday. "I was really sweating it out, right up to the last minute," he told me. Then he pulled out the five brand new paintings he'd done for us, and knocked me out all over again.

WAIT—THERE'S MORE. Starting next issue is a new Greg Benford novel, "Jupiter Project," a "hard-science" novel set on a space-station orbiting Jupiter. And, to go with it are two new covers done especially for it by an artist you've never heard of before: Don Davis.

Davis works for NASA as an artist, but that may mean less to you than the fact that he is Chesley Bonestell's protégé. And his two paintings for Greg's novel are, in fact, better than anything Bonestell's had on the cover of any sf magazine in fifteen years. Yes, he's that good. He's too good for us to keep him a secret—I'm told he'll have a cover upcoming on the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, long Bonestell's stamping ground—but we're quite pleased to be able to publish his debut covers here and we hope to have more fine "astronomical" covers from him from time to time.

Our policy, you see, is not to restrict ourselves to one style of cover or one philosophy of cover painting. From this issue's fine Todd/Bodé collaboration to Mike Hinge, to Don Davis, to Pederson and Jeff Jones and Mike Kaluta—our policy is to present you with some of the best work by some of science fiction's best and most exciting cover artists.

It's our way of celebrating. Every issue.

—TED WHITE

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B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	27,400	27,300
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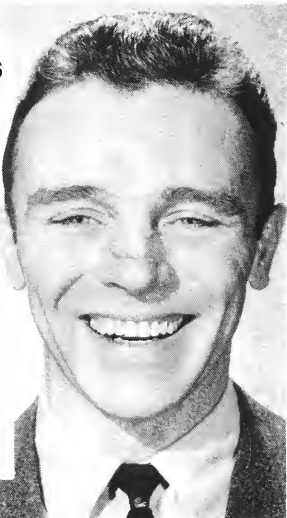
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